

Are we Living in the Last Days?

A Stonegate Workshop

An Important Disclaimer.....	2
Interpreting the Bible 101	2
Some Basic Terms	3
The Last Days According to Jesus The Olivet Discourse.....	4
What Have We Learned? Were are We Going?	4
Matthew 24 Two Questions.....	5
Jesus Answers Question #1.....	6
The Anti Christ and the Beast of Revelation.....	6
Question #1: Some Conclusions	9
Jesus Answers Question #2.....	10
What Is The Great Tribulation?	10
The Rapture.....	14
What Will the Days of the Second Coming Be Like?	15
What Does Jesus Expect Of Us in the Meantime?.....	16
Answering the Question	17
Appendix: What Did the Temple's Destruction Mean?.....	18
Recommended Resources.....	19

A. An Important Disclaimer

- What you will hear today is *not* Stonegate's official position (we don't have one)
- Instead, this is *my* (Josh Gatewood's) position
- The *elders* have given me permission to share my view
- Even our elders have *different* views. This is *not* a hill we're going to die on.
- See Resource page for additional material for other views.

B. Interpreting the Bible 101

- The Bible was written *for* us, but it was not written *to* us
- Vital to ask: How did the *original audience* understand this passage?
- You must never read a Bible *verse*; instead you have to read the *context*
- Critical Distinction: original *meaning* and the modern *application*
 - The original meaning(s) is *the* meaning.
 - We don't get our own *personal* meaning,
 - But we can apply it in a very personal *way*.

"We want to know what the Bible means *for us*—legitimately so. But we cannot make it mean anything that pleases us and then give the Holy Spirit 'credit' for it. The Holy Spirit cannot be brought into the process [of interpretation] to contradict what is said, since the Spirit is the one who inspired the original intent. Therefore, the Spirit's help for us will come in our discovering the original intent and guiding us as we try to faithfully apply that meaning to our own situations...*A text can never mean what it could never have meant for its original readers/hearers.* Or to put it in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken or written. This is the starting point." — Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart¹

If there was one bit of wisdom, one rule of thumb, one single skill I could impart, one useful tip I could leave that would serve you well the rest of your life, what would it be? What is the single most important practical skill I've ever learned as a Christian?

Here it is: *Never read a Bible verse.* That's right, never read a Bible verse. Instead, always read a paragraph at least. — Greg Koukl²

¹ *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 5th Edition, 34–35.

² "Never Read a Bible Verse," *Stand to Reason Ministries*, February 4, 2013.

C. Some Basic Terms

1. The Great *Tribulation*: period of intense distress, persecution, and calamity on Earth.
2. The *Millennium*: the period in which Jesus is actively reigning on Earth before He establishes the New Heaven and New Earth
 - Could be a literal 1000 years and a literal earthly reign.
 - Could be a figurative 1000 years and a spiritual reign.
 - **The positions here are divided up into four primary camps:**
 - *Historic Pre-Millennialism*: “The doctrine stating that after the Second Coming of Christ, [Christ] will reign for a thousand years over the earth before the final consummation of God’s redemptive purpose in the new heavens and the new earth of the Age to Come.”³
 - *Dispensational Pre-Millennialism*: Same as Historic Pre-Millennialism, but with the belief that Jesus will secretly rapture (remove) the church prior to the Great Tribulation and Prior to His second coming. This position has been very influential and widespread throughout much of the popular Evangelical and Southern Baptist culture for the past 50 years.
 - *A-millennialism*: “Amillennialists interpret the millennium ... as describing the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven. They understand the binding of Satan ... as being in effect during the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ, though ending shortly before Christ’s return. They teach that Christ will return after this heavenly reign.”⁴
 - *Post-millennialism*: “Postmillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the millennium.”⁵

The reason for this nomenclature is because, over time, each view began to be known by its interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10, particularly the timing of the return of Christ with reference to the period of 1,000 years mentioned therein. Therefore, *amillennialists* expect *no* millennium (The prefix –a means, “no”), *postmillennialists* believe Christ returns *after* the millennium (the prefix – post, means “after”), and *premillennialists* believe Christ returns *before* the millennium (the prefix –pre, means “before”).⁶

³George Eldon Ladd, “Historic Premillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* 17.

⁴Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 173.

⁵Loraine Boettner, “A postmillennial Response [To Historic Premillennialism] in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, 52–53.

⁶Alan S. Bundy, “Views of the Millenium,” *TheGospelCoalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/views-of-the-millennium/>

D. The Last Days According to Jesus | The Olivet Discourse

Matthew 24; Mark 13; and Luke 21

Immediate Context

- Matthew 23— Jesus pronounces *judgment* on Israel’s leaders
- Matthew 23:33–36 — Jesus describes the judgment to come upon “*this* generation.”
- Matthew 23:38 — Jesus declares what this judgment will be—“your house will be left to you desolate.”
- Matthew 24:1–2— Jesus predicts the temple’s destruction

Historical & Theological Context

- This was Israel’s *second* temple
 - The first was Solomon’s Temple. Destroyed in 587 BC by the Babylonians (King Nebuchadnezzar; cf Book of Daniel)
 - This temple was the *Herodian* Temple—built by King Herod in 19 B.C.⁷
 - First century Jews believed the Messiah would come to reign on the throne of this temple and *overthrow* the Roman Empire.
- The temple was Israel’s symbol of God’s *presence* on Earth

As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and ***the glory of the Lord filled the temple***. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because ***the glory of the Lord filled the Lord’s house***. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and ***the glory of the Lord on the temple***, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” — 2 Chronicles 7:1–3

- Jesus is predicting a *worst* -case scenario for first-century Jews.
- The temple was central to their *spiritual* and *political* hope

What Have We Learned Already?? Where Are We Going With This??

- In Matthew 24:1–2 Jesus is predicting a *cataclysmic* event.
- Jesus is predicting the destruction of the most important *symbol* in Israel’s spiritual and political life.
- In Matthew 24ff— Jesus is predicting something that will take place in the *1st*- century
- *Most*—possibly *all*—of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24 has *already happened*

⁷ Technically there was a reconstruction of the first temple by Zerubbabel in the 6th century B.C. only a few decades after the temple was destroyed, but it didn’t compare to the elaborate temple built by Herod. As a result, most biblical scholars divide up the Jewish temple periods between the first temple by Solomon and the second temple by Herod.

E. Matthew 24:1–3 | Two Questions

1. When will “these things” happen? (v.3a)

As he approached and saw the city, he wept for it, saying, “If you knew this day what would bring peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. For the days will come on you when *your enemies will build a barricade around you, surround you, and hem you in on every side*. They will crush you and your children among you to the ground, and *they will not leave one stone on another in your midst, because you did not recognize the time when God visited you.*” — Luke 19:41–44

2. What is the sign of your coming and the end of the age? (v.3b)

- “End of the age” does *not* mean end of the world
- “End of the age” means: end of the present Jewish age—the Old Covenant.
- In 1st century Jewish thought, there are only two ages: this age and the age to come (the age of the Messiah)⁸
- NT Christians believed they were living in the overlap of the two ages

Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea... And don't grumble as some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer. These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom ***the ends of the ages have come***. — 1 Corinthians 10:1, 10–11

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that he might now appear in the presence of God for us. He did not do this to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the sanctuary yearly with the blood of another. Otherwise, he would have had to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared one time, ***at the end of the ages***, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself — Hebrews 9:24–26

⁸ See these passages for examples of how these categories framed the thinking of Jesus and his disciples: Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Ephesians 1:21; Hebrews 6:5.

Matthew 24:4–14 | Jesus A/2 Q. #1 – “The Beginning of Labor Pains”

Sign #1: *false teachers* (v.4–5,11)

Jesus replied to them, “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and they will deceive many. (v.4–5)

- NT Christians saw this fulfilled in *their* lifetime. (Acts 8:9–10; 20:29–30; 21:38; Romans 16:17–18; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1–7)
- The Jewish historian Josephus reports that during the reign of Nero (54–68 AD), false-messiahs were arrested on a *daily* basis.

Question: What About the Anti-Christ & The Beast of Revelation?????????????

- There are *four* references to “anti-christ” in the New Testament
- All of them are in *1 & 2 John*
- Each of them refer to false *teachers* or false *teaching* (i.e. that Jesus wasn’t fully human)
- All of them assume the anti-christ is *presently active* in the world they lived in.
- **Some Interpretations of the Anti-Christ throughout History⁹**
 - Any American *President*
 - The *Roman Catholic* Church and/or the *Pope* (16–17th century)¹⁰
 - Napoleon Bonaparte (18th–19th century)
 - Adolf Hitler (20th century)
- **What About the Mark of the Beast?**
 - The One-Dollar Bill
 - The *Barcode*
 - The *Internet*
 - The *iPhone*
 - Anything involving *technology*. #BillGates #microchip #conspiracy

⁹ See Joe Carter, “The 7 Most Popular Contenders for the Title ‘Anti-Christ’”, *The Gospel Coalition*, November, 16, 2012.

¹⁰ “American colonists framed their local military clashes as part of a global struggle between Catholics and the Protestant Interest... ‘Scarlet whore’ and ‘Antichrist’ were common biblical epithets that Protestants assigned to the Catholic Church.” Thomas Kidd, *America’s Religious History*, 46.

Remember: The book of Revelation had a *first century* audience¹¹

Revelation 13 & Revelation 17

“The beast was given a mouth to utter boasts and blasphemies. It was allowed to exercise authority for **forty-two months**... And it was permitted to **wage war against the saints and to conquer them**. It was also given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation All those who live on the earth will **worship** it... This calls for wisdom: Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, because it is the number of a person. Its number is **666**.” — Revelation 13:5, 7–8, 18

“The seven heads are **seven mountains** on which the woman is seated. They are also *seven* kings: Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes, he must remain for only a little while. — Revelation 17:9–10

Some Interesting Historical Facts:¹²

- “The city on 7 hills” was a common nickname for the city of *Rome*. (17:9)
- Nero was the *sixth* king after Julius Caesar (17:10)
 - The emperor after Nero (Galba) only reigned for 7 months (“only a little while.”)
 - Nero was called “The *Beast*”
 - Nero persecuted Christians for *42* Months (13:5, 7)
 - Nero was *worshipped* as divine (a common practice for Roman Emperors)
 - “666” = “*Nero Caesar*” in Hebrew cryptogram
- My current conclusion: I don’t know ... but *they*—first century Christians—probably *did*
- Biggest problem with this position: it depends on an early dating of Revelation (ca 65 AD). Most (even conservative) scholars believe Revelation was written closer to 95AD.¹³

¹¹ Revelation is considered the oldest of the NT books. Debates concerning its dating locate the writing of Revelation either in the *middle* of the first century prior to 70 AD or at the *end* the first century around 95 AD. There are good arguments by conservative scholars for both sides of this. The following Historical Facts provide evidence for an *earlier* dating of pre-70 AD. However, the main point remains: we must read the book of Revelation in light of first century ideas, symbols, and context if we are going to properly interpret its meaning. For more on this subject, see the resources at the end of this workbook.

¹² Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 414–422; R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, 156–162

¹³ For the best defense of the early dating see Kenneth Gentry, *When Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*

Sign #2: **Political & Military Conflict** (v.6–7)

You are going to hear of **wars and rumors of wars**. See that you are not alarmed, because these things must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. (v.6–7a)

- An unusual claim in at this time.
 - For most nations under Roman rule, there was a great period of relative peace because of the *Pax Romana* (The Peace of Rome) that lasted for 200 years.¹⁴
 - 33–70AD: 20,000 Jewish killed in an uprising in Caesarea; 50,000 Jewish killed in Alexandria; 10,000 Jewish killed in Damascus.
 - Wars in Germany, Africa, Armenia, and Britain between 14–68 AD.¹⁵

Sign #3: **Famines & Earthquakes** (v.7)

- **Famines:** Acts 11:27–30 documents a prediction of “a severe famine throughout the Roman world...[that would] take place during the reign of Claudius [44 AD].”
 - 3 other famines during the reign of Claudius (41–54 AD); Major famine in Rome 51 AD
- **Earthquakes:** There are 4 recorded Earthquakes in the New Testament
 - Jesus’ crucifixion (33 AD), Jesus’ resurrection (33 AD), Upper room prayer meeting in Acts 2 (33 AD), Paul and Silas released from prison in Philippi in Acts 16 (AD 45–50).
 - The Cities of Laodicea, Hieropolis, and Colossae were devastated by a quake in year 60.
- COVID-19 is probably not one of the famines Jesus is referring to.

Sign #4 & 5: **Persecution and Apostasy** (v.9–10)

Acts 4:1–18; 5:17–40; 12:1; 23:24; 24:27; 2 Timothy 1:15; 4:10, 16; Hebrews 6:1–8; 10:26–39)

But you, be on your guard! They will hand you over to local courts, and you will be flogged in the **synagogues**... — Mark 13:9a (cf. Luke 21:12)

Children, **it is the last hour**. And as you have heard that **antichrist is coming**, even now **many antichrists have come**. **By this we know that it is the last hour**. They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. — 1 John 2:18–19 (cf. 1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7)

¹⁴ Donald L. Wasson, “Pax Romana,” *Ancient History Encyclopedia Online*, December 8, 2015.

¹⁵ Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 239–240.

Sign #6: The world-wide proclamation of the *Gospel* (cf. Mark 13:10)

This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.(v.14)

You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. It is bearing fruit and growing *all over the world*...This gospel has been proclaimed *in all creation under heaven*. — Colossians 1:5–6a, 23b

The NT writers used this phrase to refer to the *known* world at the time (cf. Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28; Acts 24:5; Romans 1:8)¹⁶

“Through Christ-commissioned gospel preaching by faithful messengers, God gathers the elect into His kingdom from the four corners of the world (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 13:47; 17:30). The phrase ‘from one end of the sky to the other’ does not indicate that the place of the action is in the sky (or heaven) above. The phraseology often signifies nothing more than ‘horizon to horizon’ (Deut. 30:4; Neh. 1:9; compare Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28-29). Thus, it speaks about evangelistic activity spreading throughout the earth. In fact, it parallels ‘from the four winds,’ that is, the four points of the compass. This, of course, Jesus promises in His ministry, despite the failure of His own people: ‘And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness (Matt. 8:11-12; Luke 13:29 speaks about all four points of the compass)” — Kenneth Gentry (*The Great Tribulation*, 64).

“The reference to the “trumpet” is perhaps an allusion to the means by which the OT Jubilee was announced: “Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land” (Lev. 25:9). The point of its use here is to declare that with the destruction of the Temple the *ultimate* Jubilee Year has arrived. That is to say, “by employing imagery from the typological Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25, the Lord here speaks about the final stage of redemption, which is finally secured as the temple vanishes from history” (Gentry, 61). Jesus himself announced the fulfillment of the Jubilee law in his ministry when he quoted from Isa. 61 in his synagogue sermon (Luke 4:17-21). The ultimate deliverance of God’s people and liberation from all “indebtedness” has come in the person of Christ.” — Sam Storms¹⁷

Question #1 | Some Conclusions

1. None of these were “signs of the end,” but “the beginning of labor pains.”
2. Each of these events had first-century *fulfillment*
3. We need to stop reading *American News* into Biblical Prophecy.
4. What we witness today probably has more to do with a *broken* world than with the *end* of the world.

¹⁶ “In Jesus’ day, “world” meant “primarily the area surrounding the Mediterranean and the lesser known areas to the east, around which stretched mysterious regions...beyond the fringes of civilization.” — R.T. France, (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 909)

¹⁷ Matthew 24 & the Olivet Discourse, Part 3, *Enjoying God Ministries*.

Remember: the disciples asked, “What is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (v.2)

A few things to observe:

- The disciples want to know when the end is coming.
- The “end of the age” does not mean “end of the world.”
- The “end of the age” means “The end of the *Jewish* age.”

Jesus provides the answer to this question in Matthew 24:15ff

Matthew 24:15–35 | Question #2: “The Great Tribulation”

“So when you see **the abomination of desolation**, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place” (let the reader understand)...” (v.15)

A Few Questions:

1. Who is Jesus talking to? | His *disciples* – (“When **you** see....”)
2. How will they experience “the abomination of desolation”? | They’ll **see** it.
3. Where will this abomination of desolation be? | “In the holy place” – aka: in *the temple*
4. What is “the abomination of desolation”??

• **The Abomination of Desolation | What was it?**

- Daniel 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11.
- Every reference refers to the desecration of the *temple*
- Historically, Jesus’ followers would have been aware of a specific incident in 168 B.C.
- The Syrian King Antiochus slaughtered 40,000 Jews, plundered the temple, and sacrificed a *pig* on the altar. He then set up an image of Zeus above the altar to be worshipped.¹⁸

• **The Abomination of Desolation | What is it?**

- Jesus is probably describing a repeat scenario of what happened in 168 B.C.
- Something to do with the temple and *pagan* worship

When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that *its desolation has come near*. — Luke 21:20

- The Roman Army (under General Titus) began a 5 month siege on Jerusalem in *69AD*
- Note Jesus’ Instructions — Run Away! (v.16–20 cf. Ezekiel 7:12–16)

¹⁸ “This passage [Daniel 9:22–27]...was read in the second century BC as referring to Antiochus’ desecration of the Temple... Equally clearly, the natural implication in the first century AD would be that the Romans, the present occupying forces, would destroy the city and the Temple, setting up their own abomination in place of the sacrificial system.” — NT Wright, (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 351–352).

- **The Horror of A.D. 70 (v.21–22)**

"For at that time there will be great distress, the kind that hasn't taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again." (v.21)

- The Siege: starvation, disease, dehydration, cannibalism, and more.
 - People sold their homes and their children to obtain food.
 - People regularly ate from public sewers.
 - Thousands were crucified (500 p/day) by the Romans when they fled to look for food.
- 1,100,000 were killed; 100,000 survivors were sold into slavery.

"While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain. Nor was there commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity; but children, old men, profane persons, and priests were all slain in the same manner. . . . Moreover, many, when they saw the fire, exerted their utmost strength, and did break out into groans and outcries. Perea also did return the echo, as well as the mountains round about Jerusalem, and augmented the force of the noise. Yet was the misery itself more terrible than this disorder. For one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething hot, as if full of fire on every part, that the blood was more in quantity than the fire, and that the slain were more in numbers than they who slew them. **For the ground did nowhere appear visible because of the dead bodies that lay upon it**" — Josephus (*The Wars of the Jews*, 6.5:1).

"The upper rooms were filled with women and children dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the market places like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them... Thus the miseries of Jerusalem from worse and worse every day..." — Josephus (*The Wars of the Jews*, 5.512–513).

While the city was still burning, the soldiers brought their legionary standards [images of Caesar and the Roman Eagle] into the temple precincts and offered sacrifices [to their gods] there, declaring Titus to be [the] victor. The idolatrous representations of Caesar and the Roman eagle on the standards would have constituted the worst imaginable blasphemy to the Jewish people." — Sam Storms, (*Kingdom Come*, 246).

- Jesus warns of false teachers rising up to offer false hope of *salvation* (v.23–26)
- This "coming of the Son of Man" is not His coming to save, but His coming to *judge* the nation of Israel through the army of Rome (v.27–28; cf. Isaiah 10:5–11)

"Where the carcass is, there the vultures [or eagles] will gather." (v.28)

- What was the national symbol of Rome? The *Eagle*

• **The Coming of the Son of Man (v.29–31; cf. Matthew 26:64)**

Question #1: Is Jesus talking about astronomical signs (i.e. Blood Moons)?

Answer: No—Jesus is using OT *judgment language* to describe a kingdom *change*.

- Babylon (Isaiah 13:9–10)
- Egypt (Ezekiel 32:7–8, 15)
- Edom (Isaiah 34:4–5)

The OT used heavenly language to describe the destruction of earthly kingdoms (cf. Jeremiah 4:23, 28; Isaiah 5:30; 60:20; Amos 8:2–9; Zephaniah 1:4, 15; Joel 2:10)

Question #2: Is the Son of Man coming *down* or is he coming *up*? (v.30b)

I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly *one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him.* He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed. — Daniel 7:13–14

Answer: He is coming up to receive His Kingdom, Dominion, and Authority.¹⁹

Question #3: What's the *sign* that this is happening? What will the people *see*? (v.30)

Answer: The destruction of the temple²⁰

Answer: These verses use OT symbols to describe Jesus' enthronement over the nation of Israel and the end of the Jewish age (cf. Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20–21; 2:11–3:6; Heb. 13:12–14)

Question #4: What's v.31 all about? Who are the angels?

Answer: The proclamation of the gospel throughout the world (cf. Colossians 1:23)

Answer: (a) human messengers or (b) spiritual beings who empower the gospel proclamation.

¹⁹ “The coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven was never conceived as a primitive form of space travel, but as a symbol for a mighty reversal of fortunes within history and at the national level.” — G.B. Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*, 20; N.T. Wright notes, “Here the “coming” of the Son of Man in v. 30 is an allusion to Daniel 7:13-14 which speaks *not of a “coming to earth” from heaven but of a “coming to God” in heaven to receive vindication and authority.* This “coming” refers to an event “whereby the authority of Jesus is vindicated over the Jewish establishment which has rejected him” (*Jesus & The Victory of God*, 344).

²⁰ “This “coming” is not a visible, physical appearance by which Jesus returns to earth (although that will most assuredly occur at the end of history). Rather, they will “see” him in the sense that they will “understand”, i.e., spiritually *perceive* that he is the vindicated and enthroned King. For “seeing” = “understanding”, see John 12:40 (Isa. 6:10); Acts 26:18; cf. 1 Kings 8:29,52; 2 Kings 2:16; 6:20; 19:16; Isa. 35:5; 42:7,16; see also Luke 24:31; also note Mark 1:44; Luke 17:22; John 3:3,36; Rom. 15:21. “ — Sam Storms (*Kingdom Come*, 270–271).

What Is “The Great Tribulation”?

Better Question: What **was** the Great Tribulation?

Answer: The destruction of the Jerusalem *Temple* in *70 AD.* (v.32–35)

*“Truly I tell you, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things take place. **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**” (v.34–35)*

- Jesus makes it clear: all these things will take place in **“this generation”** (v.32–34)²¹
- The old kingdom will be gone (“Heaven and Earth”) but the new kingdom is here (“My Words”)
- The Great Tribulation is something in the *past*, not something in the *future*.
- The end of the *Jewish* age has come

“Surely Jesus does not denounce the first-century temple in which He is standing (24:1) by declaring it ‘desolate’ (23:38), prophesying its total destruction (24:2), then answering the question ‘when shall these things be?’ (v. 3), and warning about the temple’s ‘abomination of desolation’ (v. 15) only to speak about the destruction of a totally different temple some two thousand years (or more) later!” — Kenneth Gentry (*The Great Tribulation*, 24)

“The days of Jerusalem’s destruction would be looked upon as days of cosmic catastrophe. The known world would go into convulsions: power struggles and *coups d’etat* would be the order of the day; the *pax Romana* [peace of Rome], the presupposition of ‘civilized’ life throughout the then Mediterranean world, would collapse into chaos. In the midst of that chaos Jerusalem would fall. The ‘son of man’ would thereby be vindicated. That would be the sign that the followers of this ‘son of man’ would now spread throughout the world: his ‘angels’, that is, messengers, would summon people from north, south, east and west to come and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of YHWH” — N.T. Wright, (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 362–63).

“This prophecy, therefore, is designed to tell the disciples then (and us now) that the temple is no longer, and never shall be again, where you go to meet God. The temple is no longer, and never shall be again, the place of God’s dwelling. The temple is no longer, and never shall be again, the place where blood sacrifice is offered. The temple is no longer, and never shall be again, the place where forgiveness of sins is found. The temple is no longer, and never shall be again, the place where you go to hear God’s voice and learn about who he is. *All these things now are found in Jesus alone.* He is the true temple of God. He is the person and place of sacrifice where forgiveness is found and God’s voice is heard and God’s glory and presence are encountered. So, when the temple in Jerusalem was razed, leveled, and flattened such that not one stone was left upon another, the people of that day “saw” that everything the temple symbolized and achieved is now found in King Jesus who rules over the universe. There has been a regime change. The temple is dethroned. Jesus is enthroned. — Sam Storms (*Kingdom Come*, 286)

²¹ “...the word “generation” is used elsewhere in Matthew (and the other gospels) of those living in Christ’s day (see Mt. 12:38-39; 16:4; 17:17). [Moreover] every time the words ‘this generation’ occur in the gospels they mean **Jesus’ contemporaries**, i.e., the sum total of those living at the same time he did. Read Mt. 11:16; 12:41,42,45; and esp. 23:36. [Finally], the adjective “this” points to the contemporary nature of the generation Jesus had in mind; if he had in mind a future generation he would more likely have chosen the adjective “that.” — Sam Storms, “Matthew 24 and the Olivet Discourse Part 1,” *EnjoyingGodMinistries*, www.samstorms.org

The Rest of Matthew 24 | The Second Coming and The Rapture (?)

1. Matthew 24:36–51

Two Options:

1. Jesus is still referring to the *same* event (“concerning *that day*”)
2. Jesus is referring to a *different* event—namely, His second coming

2. What About the Rapture?

Some Interesting Historical Facts:

- The Rapture is the most *recent* theological position on the end times in the entire history of the church.
- It was first taught in *1830s* by John Nelson Darby
- *No one* (that we know of) believed (or taught) the Rapture prior to this.

“D[ispensational] P[remillennialism] first emerged as a distinct *system* of biblical interpretation with the *Plymouth Brethren* movement in early 19th century England. Key figures who advocated a sharp division between God's purposes for Israel and the Church included John Nelson Darby, Benjamin Wills Newton, George Muller, Samuel Tregelles, William Kelly, William Trotter, and Charles Henry Mackintosh. Those in America who were highly influenced by the Brethren movement, at least in terms of its eschatology, include Dwight L. Moody, James Inglis, James Hall Brookes, A. J. Gordon, and most important of all, *C. I. Scofield*. In 1909 the first edition of what came to be known as *The Scofield Reference Bible* (second edition in 1917) was published by Oxford Press. DP quickly spread in popularity and remains the dominant view among conservative evangelical as well as charismatic believers today.” — Sam Storms²²

²² Sam Storms, “The Dispensational Premillennial View of the Kingdom of God,” *EnjoyingGod Ministries*. This is an excellent article summarizing the history and core tenants of dispensationalism and the rapture position contained within it.

Matthew 24:37–42 | The Days of Noah (v.37–41; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11)

*As the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. 38 For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark. 39 They didn't know until the flood came and swept them all away. This is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be. 40 Then **two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. 41 Two women will be grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left. 42 Therefore be alert, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming.** — Matthew 24:37–42*

- **Q:** Who was left on the Earth in the days of Noah?
- **A:** The **righteous** were left behind, not the **wicked**. (Genesis 7–9)
- Jesus is not talking about a *secret rapture*, but about a *visible judgment*.
- Josh's opinion: The NT does **not** teach a *secret rapture* of believers (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50–55)

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 is Paul's teaching about what is popularly called the rapture. The rapture is the miraculous transportation of all living Christians to heaven at the return of Jesus. There is a lot of misinformation about this event, but this passage gives us some definite truths about it. Paul made it clear that Jesus' return will not be secret but will be visible; it will be a bodily return; and it will be a triumphant return, for He will not come in lowliness and meekness as He did at His first advent, but in power and glory. The angels told the disciples, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Just as He left visibly on the [glory] cloud, so He will come again visibly on this cloud of glory. — R.C. Sproul²³

F. What Will the Days Be Like at the End?

- Widespread **Normalcy** — "eating and drinking, marrying, etc." (v. 38; cf. Luke 17:28–30)
- A strong sense of "**Peace** and **Safety**" (1 Thessalonians 5:3)
- It will be a total **Surprise**— "like a thief in the night" (v. 43; cf. 1 Thess. 5:2–4; 2 Peter 3:10)

There will not be unprecedented global catastrophes, unparalleled calamities, that will point people to the impending return of Jesus. Rather, humanity will be immersed in the routine affairs of life. It will be like it was in the days of Noah. The world will be caught completely off-guard by the coming of Christ. People will be engaged in normal, routine occupations of life: farming, fellowship, marriage, etc. (Cf. Luke 17:28–30; 1 Thess. 5:3.) Jesus will come at a time of widespread indifference, normalcy, materialistic endeavors, when everyone is thoroughly involved in the pursuit of their earthly affairs and ambitions. Cf. 2 Pt. 3:3–4, 10. His coming will occur at a time so unexpected, so unannounced, that it will catch people in the middle of their everyday routines. See vv. 40–41. When will Jesus come? *Jesus will come at a time when his coming is the farthest thing from people's minds!* — Sam Storms²⁴

²³ R.C. Sproul, "What is the Rapture?", *Ligonier Ministries*, June 16, 2012.

²⁴ "Matthew 24 and the Olivet Discourse, Part 3, *Enjoying God Ministries*.

G. What Does Jesus Expect of us in the Meantime?

*Blessed is that servant whom the master finds **doing his job** when he comes. — Matthew 24:46 (cf. Acts 1:6–8; Ephesians 1:13–14; 5:29)*

In one way we think a great too much of the atomic bomb. ‘How are we to live in an atomic age?’ I am tempted to reply: ‘Why, as you would have lived in the 16th century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in the Viking age when the raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night ... In other words, **do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation...** It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of a painful and premature death...in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.

The first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, **let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things**—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friend over a pint and a game of darts—**not huddled together like frightened sheep** and thinking about bombs. **They may break our bodies** (a microbe can do that) **but they need not dominate our minds.** — C.S. Lewis²⁵

- Let’s stop *speculating* and *spectating* and let’s get in the game.
- Please—for the love of Jesus, his people, and those you influence—*stop believing every new conspiracy theory that hits social media.*
- Let’s stop living like the sky is falling and let’s start living like Jesus is *King*

Jesus came near and said to them, “*All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. **Go, therefore, and make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them* to observe everything I have commanded you. *And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” — Matthew 28:18–20*

²⁵ C.S. Lewis, “On Living in an Atomic Age,” in *Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays* (New York: Harper One, 1982), 95–96.

Answering the Question: Are We Living in the Last Days?

- Yes & No

- Yes—we are living in “the age to come”: the Messianic age, the New Covenant age, the final age before the final age—the 2nd coming of Christ.
- No—we are not in the final moments of history leading up to Christ’s second coming
- BUT—Jesus could come back any day and surprise us. Just remember: it will be a surprise, not an expectation.
- Until then, let’s focus less on what we don’t know and more on what we do know
- Jesus is advancing His kingdom; He is marching forward—will we join Him?

“Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
— Matthew 6:9–10

25 “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? **26** Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? **27** Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? **28** And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. **30** If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith? **31** So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ **32** For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But **seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**, and all these things will be provided for you. **34** Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. — Matthew 6:25–34

23 But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ. **24** Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he abolishes all rule and all authority and power. **25** For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet...The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. **57** But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! **58** Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. — 1 Corinthians 15:23–25; 56–58

Appendix: What Did the Destruction of the Temple Mean for Gods People?

1. God's Judgment on the Nation of Israel

So all the righteous blood shed on the earth will be charged to you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. **36** Truly I tell you, all these things will come on this generation. **37** "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! **38** See, your house is left to you desolate. **39** For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" — Mathew 23:34–38 (cf. Zech. 14)

2. God's Permanent *Rejection* of the Temple as His Dwelling Place

For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come. — Hebrews 13:14

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, built on the *foundation of the apostles and prophets*, with *Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone*. In him *the whole building*, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit. — Ephesians 2:18–22 (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19–20; 1 Peter 2:4–6; John 14:6)

The Temple is No Longer the Place for:

- Hearing God's Voice (Hebrews 1:1–4; 2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- Meeting with God (Hebrews 4:1–12; 10:19–25)
- A Priest to Intercede on Our Behalf (Hebrews 4:14–5:10; 7:1–8:13; 9:11–28)
- Blood Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1–18)
- Forgiveness of Sins (Hebrews 10:1–18; Ephesians 1:7)
- The Glory of God to Dwell (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19–20; Ephesians 2:18–22)

3. A New Era in Redemptive History (i.e. "The Age to Come")

They will be killed by the sword and be led captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. — Luke 21:24 (cf. Romans 11; Ephesians 2:11–3:6; Zech. 2:6–12)

Heaven and earth (= The Temple) will pass away, but my words (= The Authority of Jesus) will never pass away. — Mark 13:31 (cf. Matthew 24:35; Luke 21:33; Ephesians 1:19–21)

Recommended Resources

Resources Arguing a Post-Tribulation A-millennial Perspective (what you heard tonight)

- “The Eschatology of Jesus Part 1, 2, and 3” by Sam Storms (Online Articles)
- “Defenders Series 2: Doctrine of Last Things” by William Lane Craig (Online Sunday School Class)
- *Kingdom Come* by Sam Storms (This resource was the most significant influence on Josh’s thinking)
- *The Bible and the Future* by Anthony Hoekema
- *The Case for Amillennialism* by Kim Riddlebarger
- *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Tyndale Commentary) by R.T. France

Resources Arguing for a Dispensational Pre-tribulation, Pre-millennial Perspective

- *Biblical Doctrine* (Ch.10) by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue
- *The Late, Great Planet Earth* by Tim LaHaye
- *Dispensationalism* by Lewis Sperry Chafer
- *Dispensationalism Today* Charles C. Ryrie
- *The Left Behind Book Series* by Tim LaHaye (fictional scenarios applying the Dispensational view)
- *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* by Robert L. Saucy

Resources Arguing for a Historic Pre- or Post-Tribulation, Premillennial Perspective

- *Systematic Theology* (Ch.54–57) by Wayne Grudem
- “Definitions and Observations Concerning the 2nd Coming of Christ,” by John Piper (Online Article)
- *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* George E. Ladd
- *The Church and the Tribulation* by Robert Gundry
- *The Return of Christ* ed. by David Allen and Steve Lemke

Resources Arguing for a Post-Tribulation, Postmillennial Perspective²⁶

- “The Last Days According to Jesus” by R.C. Sproul (Online Teaching Series)
- “On Earth As it Is in Heaven” I Documentary on *YouTube*
- *PostMillennialism Made Easy* by Kenneth Gentry
- *He Shall Have Dominion* by Kenneth Gentry
- *Victory in Jesus* by Greg Bahnsen
- *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* by Keith A. Mathison
- *Paradise Restored* by David Chilton

Resources Presenting Multiple Views for the End Times (Academic)

- *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* by Kenneth Gentry & Thomas Ice
- *Revelation: Four Views* by Steve Gregg
- *Four Views on the Millennium & Beyond* ed. by Darrell C. Bock
- *Four Views on Revelation* ed. by C. Marvin Pate
- *Three Views on the Rapture* ed. by Stanley N. Gundry

Commentaries on the Book of Revelation

- *Revelation* by James Hamilton (Historic Pre-Millennial)
- *Return of the King* by Vern Poythress (A-Millennial)
- *When the Man Comes Around* by Douglas Wilson (Post-Millennial)

²⁶ The Postmillennial and A-millennial interpret Matthew 24 in very much the same way.