

A SKETCH OF MAT. 24:1-42

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There is much disagreement among scholars over the interpretation of Matthew 24 and its parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21.¹ No approach is free of difficulties, but I here sketch the view that makes the most sense to me. For much of the following, I am indebted to D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:488-508.

I. Mat. 24:1-42

A. Mat. 24:1-3 (ESV) – *Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.² But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"*

In Mat. 24:1-2, Jesus pronounces doom on the temple. As he indicated in chapter 23, the fate of the temple and of Israel nationally is determined by Israel's response to him. The disciples assume that the destruction of the temple occurs at the end of the age, at the consummation,² an event they associate with some kind of climactic "coming" of

¹ Evangelical treatments of Mat. 24:1-42 can be divided into four basic approaches summarized as follows by David L. Turner in "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41: Interaction With Evangelical Treatments," *Grace Theological Journal* 10.1 (1989), 3-4:

The first view, which will be called the futurist view, stresses the age-ending return of Christ and finds little if anything in these verses which addresses the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or the current age. Another view, which will be called the preterist view, is to a great extent the opposite of the first view. It sees relatively little of the passage (only 24:36-41) in terms of the end times. Rather the current age is in view, with the emphasis on the destruction of Jerusalem. Two other views amount to mediating positions between the first two. The first of these mediating positions, which will be called the traditional preterist-futurist view, sees a portion of the passage (usually 24:4-14) as a general description of the course of the present age, and another portion as a "double reference" prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction and the end of the age. A second mediating position, which will be called the revised preterist-futurist view, sees alternating reference in these verses to the course of the age, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the coming of Christ.

Turner favors the traditional preterist-futurist view, which is the dominant view among evangelicals. The interpretation presented here is what he labels the revised preterist-futurist view.

² Craig Blomberg states in *Matthew*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 353: "Jesus will make clear that the destruction of the temple and the end of the age are two separate events, but probably the disciples did not yet recognize this (thus Mark 13:4), scarcely imagining that one could occur

Jesus.³ Because they understand the end to involve the destruction of the temple, Jesus' reference to that event prompts them to ask when the end, the complex of eschatological events ("these things," plural) of which the temple's destruction is a part, will occur. That question of when is then clarified in terms of the signs that will immediately precede the end. As Blomberg says, for the disciples "the two questions are one and the same" (see fn. 2). Their interest is not in the destruction of the temple per se but in the coming of the end as represented (in their minds) by the destruction of the temple.

The form of the question varies in the Gospels, with Matthew giving the fullest expression. Regarding the differences, Carson states:

Yet if we make the reasonable assumption that in the disciples' mind their question as to the temple's destruction and the signs that will presage it are linked to the end of the age and Jesus' return (cf. 16:27-28; 23:39; Luke 19:11-27), there is little problem. Matthew makes explicit what was implicit and what Jesus recognized as implicit in their question.⁴

This is key to seeing how the accounts in the Gospels correspond to each other. As in Matthew, the focus of the disciples' question in Mark and Luke, albeit implicitly, is on the coming of the end that they see represented in Jesus' statement about the destruction of the temple. At the end of each section below I will briefly note the corresponding sections from Mark and Luke.

B. Mat. 24:4-8 (ESV) – ⁴ *And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*

without the other. Hence for them the two questions are one and the same." I. Howard Marshall states in *Commentary on Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 761: "Jesus' hearers may be presumed to have regarded the destruction of the temple as an eschatological event." David Garland states in *Mark*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 491: "They clearly connect the temple's destruction to the end time, for they still see it as the center of their narrow universe." George Ladd states in *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 196: "There can be little doubt but that the disciples thought of the destruction of the temple as one of the events accompanying the end of the age and the coming of the eschatological Kingdom of God." See also, Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 688; R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 337; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 390; and William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 455.

³ Matthew 23:39 probably is the trigger for the reference to his coming. Blomberg, 353. They are not thinking in terms of a post-resurrection return "because these disciples did not yet appreciate or anticipate his resurrection." Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 340.

⁴ Carson, 497.

Jesus addresses their question about the coming of the end by warning them not to be led astray during the time until the end. Before the end comes, many will claim his title Christ, or more generally claim to be specially anointed deliverers of God, and deceive people into placing their trust in them. He also commands them not to be alarmed when the end does not come in association with some particular war, famine, or earthquake that raises expectations of the end. All these things will occur without the arrival of the end. They are but the *beginning* of "birth pains," the beginning of that period of distress of unspecified duration that precedes the consummation (the end) at the Lord's return.⁵

This section corresponds to Mk. 13:5-8 and Luke 21:8-11.

C. Mat. 24:9-14 (ESV) – ⁹ *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

During the period of time until the end ("then" in the sense of "at that time"), Christians will be persecuted and killed and will be hated throughout the world because of their allegiance to Christ. During that period, many will fall away and will betray and hate one another and many false prophets will arise and deceive many. There will be an increase in wickedness, and the love of many will grow cold. Only those who endure in the face of these trying circumstances will be saved, and despite these circumstances, the gospel will be preached throughout the whole world. Only at the end of this time of birth pains, this period of undefined length, will the end come.⁶

This section corresponds to Mk. 13:9-13 and Lk. 21:12-19. Luke 21:12 adds the detail that before *all* the specific birth pains identified in Lk. 21:8-11 would occur the disciples would be persecuted, betrayed, and hated. In other words, though all the birth pains would occur within their generation (but need not end within that time – see comments on Mat. 24:34), they would not all occur before the disciples experienced persecution, betrayal, and hatred. Indeed, Acts testifies to how quickly the church was set upon by persecution and hostility.

⁵ Carson states (498): "Birth pains' (v. 8) in this context . . . stems from such OT passages as Isaiah 13:8; 26:17; Jeremiah 4:31; 6:24; Micah 4:9-10. By this time it was almost a special term for 'the birthpangs of the Messiah,' the period of distress preceding the Messianic Age (cf. SBK, 1:905; 4:977-78; TDNT, 9:667-74; cf. 2 Baruch 27:1-30; b *Shabbath* 118a; b *Sanhedrein* 98b)."

⁶ Regarding the distress of the interadvent period, the church age, Blomberg comments (360), "All this does not mean that life for Christians in this world must remain unrelentingly evil but that in general, due to the opposition of a fallen world to the priorities of God and even despite the powerful inauguration of his kingdom, people will continue to reject the exclusive message of that kingdom."

D. Mat. 24:15-21 (ESV) – ¹⁵ "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁹ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

Having told them that wars and all kinds of upheaval and distress will occur without the arrival of the end, Jesus now applies that to their expectation that the destruction of the temple will be accompanied by the end. Given what he has told them ("Therefore," v. 15), when they see "the abomination that causes desolation," which Lk. 21:20 indicates is Jerusalem coming under attack, they must not misunderstand and think it is time for their redemption. Rather than straightening up and raising their heads as they are to do at the time of their redemption at the Second Coming (Lk. 21:27-28), in this instance they must *flee* immediately because "the abomination that causes desolation" signals not the end, as their questions indicate they believed, but a very severe episode of distress within this age of distress, a particularly sharp pain within "the birth pains of the Messiah." It is a warning to them not to be fooled into thinking the attack on Jerusalem was the Lord's promised coming.

In describing the distress of Jerusalem's fall as unequaled from the beginning of the world until now and not to be equaled again, Jesus probably was using a hyperbolic formula that emphasized the severity of the suffering, something like our "that was *the worst* _____ ever" (see Ex. 10:14, 11:16; Jub. 16:8; Ps. Philo. 19:16; also compare Josh. 10:14 with Ex. 8:13; Num. 14:20; 2 Ki. 6:18).⁷ It is just possible, however, that he was speaking literally. Carson says, "There have been greater numbers of deaths – six million in the Nazi death camps, mostly Jews, and an estimated twenty million under Stalin – but never so high a percentage of a great city's population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem."⁸ One must add to that the anguish of divine rejection evident in the destruction of the city and temple that were central to Judaism.

The statement that the great tribulation is never to be equaled implies that the tribulation referred to is *not* a tribulation at the end of history. Any tribulation at the end of history obviously cannot be equaled because there is no further history in which other tribulation can occur; there is only the consummated kingdom. In Carson's words: "That Jesus in v. 21 promises that such 'great distress' is never to be equaled again implies that it cannot refer to the Tribulation at the end of the age; for if what happens next is . . . the

⁷ See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 418-419.

⁸ Carson, 501. Nolland states (2005, 975), "Despite the Holocaust, it may still be true that the first-century Jewish War was the greatest tragedy ever to befall the Jewish people, . . ."

new heaven and the new earth, it seems inane to say that such 'great distress' will not take place again."⁹

This section corresponds to Mk. 13:14-19 and Lk. 21:20-24.

E. Mat. 24:22-28 (ESV) – ²² *And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.* ²³ *Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it.* ²⁴ *For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.* ²⁵ *See, I have told you beforehand.* ²⁶ *So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.* ²⁷ *For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* ²⁸ *Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

Jesus says that this *age of distress* – these days of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, hatred, apostasy, false christs, and false prophets – will become so bad that if it were allowed to continue, if God in his providence did not cut it short for the sake of the elect, no human being would survive.¹⁰ The world would degenerate to the point of human extinction. Christians must continue to be on guard against false christs in this time of intensified birth pains. Not only will the distress be heightened, thus increasing the tendency to follow a false deliverer, but the false christ(s) and false prophet(s) will be performing miracles (see 2 Thess. 2:9-11; Rev. 13:13-14, 16:14, 19:20). When the Lord returns, it will be clear to all; it will be as obvious as lightning that lights up the entire sky. It will be as impossible for mankind to miss the coming of Christ as for vultures to miss seeing carrion.¹¹

It is difficult to see how the days being cut short for the sake of the elect can refer to the days of Jerusalem's fall. The days of distress associated with that fall were ended (cut short) by the city's destruction and slaughter of its inhabitants. How is bringing about that conquest sooner rather than later an act of mercy for the elect? For cutting short the days of distress to be an act of mercy for the elect it must be the elect who are suffering the hardship of those days and the act of cutting them short must somehow spare the elect from the effects of those days. Christians were not suffering the hardship

⁹ Carson, 501.

¹⁰ Carson writes (502): "Many problems in interpreting the Olivet Discourse relate to the assumption that 'those days' [in v. 22] refers to the period described in vv. 15-21 and also to v. 29. But there are excellent reasons for concluding that vv. 22-28 refer to the general period of distress introduced by vv. 4-14 and that therefore 'those days' refers to the entire period of which vv. 15-21 are only one part – the 'great distress' (v. 21)." Leon Morris states in *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 605: "This verse [v. 22] is usually taken with the preceding, and this may be the way to understand it. But it makes a good deal of sense to take it as resuming the line of reasoning from verse 14 and applying primarily to the end time (though, of course, it has an application to the fall of Jerusalem also)."

¹¹ Perhaps v. 28 means that the false christs proliferating in the end are like vultures gathering over a carcass (the condemned world).

of the days of Jerusalem's fall, as they had been instructed to flee the city and reportedly did so (see Eusebius, *History of the Church* 3.5.3). But even if they were, accelerating the time of the fall is not sparing them from the effects of the days preceding the fall; it is having those days culminate in their deaths or enslavement, an outcome they were willing to suffer horribly to avoid. In addition, the term "all flesh" ("no human being," ESV) in v. 22 normally refers to all mankind and thus is broader than "no one in Jerusalem." And the unqualified term "elect" most naturally refers to all Christians and thus suggests that those for whose sake the days were cut short were not confined to Jerusalem.

Note also that the deception of false christs and false prophets in vv. 23-26 occurs during "those days" of v. 22 ("then" in v. 23 meaning "at that time").¹² This links "those days" of v. 22 back to the days of distress in vv. 4-14 rather than to the specific distress of vv. 15-21 because that same concern about being deceived by false christs and false prophets is expressed in vv. 4-14.

So it is not clear that v. 22 relates to "those days" of distress described in vv. 15-21, assertions to the contrary notwithstanding. The referent is ambiguous at best. The interpretive problems that are solved by understanding v. 22 as resuming the general subject of the days of distress in vv. 4-14, of which the fall of Jerusalem is a part, weigh in favor of that understanding.

Matthew 24:22-25 corresponds to Mk. 13:20-23. There is no corresponding section in Luke's account. There is no corresponding section in Mark or Luke's account to Mat. 24:26-28.¹³

F. Mat. 24:29-31 (ESV) – ²⁹ *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.* ³⁰ *Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* ³¹ *And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

Immediately after the "birth pains of the Messiah," there will be a divine judgment on the ungodly. The language of heavenly upheaval in v.29 is drawn from Isa. 13:10 and 34:4. Most basically this language depicts what we might call "earth-shattering" events, those interventions by God that seem to "turn the world upside down."

¹² *Tote* ("then") can mean "at that time" or "thereafter." The former makes better sense in v. 23, as the NIV and TNIV make explicit. It would be strange indeed for Jesus to condition the need for skepticism about false claims of an esoteric second coming on whether those claims were made after a certain event. Even if he foresaw that such claims would not be made until after "those days," the need for skepticism regarding them has nothing to do with when they are made. The need for skepticism is inherent in the claims; they contradict the fact the Lord's return will be open and obvious. Taking "then" in the sense of "thereafter" therefore is doubtful because it has the effect of highlighting the timing of the claims as though it is relevant to the need for skepticism.

¹³ But Lk. 17:23-24, 37 parallels Mat. 24:26-28.

In Isa. 13:10 it refers to God's judgment against Babylon; in Isa. 34:4 it refers to God's judgment against "all the nations" but particularly Edom. Similar language is used elsewhere of God's judgment within history on cities and nations (e.g., Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:9), but as Donald Hagner states, "[t]here is, however, a tendency for this language to shade into a description of the eschatological Day of the Lord. This tendency becomes more apparent in the utilization of the same language in the Pseudepigrapha (e.g., Ass. Mos. 10:5; Sib. 3:801 f.) and in the NT."¹⁴ In other words, this language became an image for the ultimate divine intervention, that which occurs at the end of the age and most radically alters this reality (age) by bringing it to a close and ushering in the final, eternal state, the consummated kingdom of God. This is easy to understand, especially if, as I think likely, the final judgment of God is a complex of events that begins with a judgment within history and culminates in the Lord's return (the Parousia), the resurrection, and the irrevocable assignment of beings to their eternal abodes.

The regular way of taking this kind of language about the coming of the Son of Man is as a reference to the Parousia. Carson writes:

Compare closely 13:40-41; 16:27; 25:31; 1 Corinthians 11:26; 15:52; 16:22; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 2:1-8; 2 Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 1:7 (cf. Didache 16). Here are references to the Son of Man's coming, angels gathering the elect, trumpet call, clouds, glory, tribes of the earth mourning, celestial disturbances – all unambiguously related to the Second Advent. It seems very doubtful, to say the least, that the natural way to understand vv. 29-35 is as a reference to the Fall of Jerusalem.¹⁵

Blomberg similarly states:

Attempts to take the "coming on the clouds of the sky" as Christ's coming spiritually in judgment against Israel at the time of the destruction of the temple, so that all of vv. 15-35 refer only to the first-century events, have to take *parousia* ("coming") in v. 27 in a way that is otherwise entirely unparalleled in the New Testament. It is much more natural, therefore, to understand Christ's coming here to earth, as in Rev 19:11-16, when Jesus brings with him all the company of the redeemed already in heaven to join his faithful people yet on earth and still alive to meet him (cf. Zech 2:6 and Deut 30:4). All this is heralded by an angelic trumpet blast (cf. 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16; and perhaps based originally on Isa 27:13).¹⁶

¹⁴ Donald Hagner, "*hēlios*" in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 3:731.

¹⁵ Carson, 493.

¹⁶ Blomberg, 363.

Other recent commentators on Matthew who recognize that Mat. 24:29-31 refers to the Parousia include David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 322-323; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 608-611; W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew Volume III*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1997), 357-364; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 583-588; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 981-986; and David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 581-584.¹⁷

This section corresponds to Mk. 13:24-27 and Lk. 21:25-28.

G. Mat. 24:32-35 (ESV) – ³² *"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.* ³³ *So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.* ³⁴ *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.* ³⁵ *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

When they see the "birth pains of the Messiah" ("all these things"), they can know that they are in the penultimate stage of history. The Judgment/Parousia is the next major step in God's redemptive purpose. They will live to see these birth pains, to see the general upheaval and the destruction of Jerusalem, but that does not mean they will see the Judgment/Parousia. In other words, the birth pains, including the destruction of the temple, must *occur* within their generation, but they need not *end* within that time. Only the Father knows how long the birth pains will last (v. 36). As Carson puts it:

¹⁷ Recent commentators on Mark who recognize that the Markan parallel (Mk. 13:24-27) refers to the Parousia include William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 473-477; Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 221-222; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 318-319; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 744-745; David E. Garland, *Mark*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 500-501; Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 347-348; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 402-404; and Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 610-616. Recent commentators on Luke who recognize that the Lukan parallel (Lk. 21:25-28) refers to the Parousia include I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 774-777; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1348-1350; Leon Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 327-328; Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 310; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 523-525; John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 1004-1007; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1682-1687; and Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 739-741.

[A]ll that v. 34 demands is that the distress of vv. 4-28, including Jerusalem's fall, happen within the lifetime of the generation then living. This does *not* mean that the distress must end within that time but only that "all these things" must happen within it. Therefore v. 34 sets a *terminus a quo* for the Parousia: it cannot happen till the events in vv. 4-28 take place, all within a generation of A.D. 30. But there is no *terminus ad quem* to this distress other than the Parousia itself, and "only the Father" knows when it will happen (v. 36).¹⁸

This section corresponds to Mk. 13:28-31 and Lk. 21:29-33.

H. Mat. 24:36-42 (ESV) – ³⁶ "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

As just stated, only the Father knows how long the birth pains will last, when the Parousia will occur. This calls for steadfastness on the part of Christians. Carson states: "Jesus expects ceaseless vigilance of his followers, for the final climax of human history will suddenly come on ordinary life. In the human condition massive distress and normal life patterns coexist. For the believer the former point to the end; the latter warn of its unexpectedness."¹⁹ The separation that occurs at that time will be based on one's faith in Christ and thus some who are similarly situated in terms of race, nationality, family, location, and occupation will have differing fates.

Matthew 24:36 corresponds to Mk. 13:32. There is no corresponding verse in Luke. There is no corresponding section in Mark or Luke's account to Mat. 24:37-42.²⁰

II. A Few Other "Coming" Texts

A. Mat. 16:27-28 (ESV) (par. Mk. 8:38-9:1; Lk. 9:26-27) – ²⁷ "For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. ²⁸ Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

¹⁸ Carson, 507.

¹⁹ Carson, 509.

²⁰ But Lk. 17:26-27, 30, 34-35 and Lk. 12:39-40 parallel Mat. 24:37-41 and 24:42-44 respectively.

Any attempt to make Mat. 16:27 refer to anything other than the Parousia stumbles on the parallel language in Mat. 25:31, a certain Parousia text, and on the fact the coming referred to is specifically said to include a universal judgment, a repaying of *each person* according to what he has done. As David Turner notes, this verse "clearly refers to the coming of Jesus to the earth and the final judgment (cf. Matt. 13:40-41; 24:30-31; 25:31; 26:64)." ²¹

The coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom that some who were present would not die before seeing (v. 28) most likely refers to the Transfiguration event understood as a kind of preview of the Parousia that Peter, James, and John were privileged to receive. ²² The careful noting by all the Synoptic writers of the time between Jesus' promise and the Transfiguration event (Mat. 17:1; Mk. 9:2; Lk. 9:28) indicates a clear literary or thematic link between the two suggesting that the writers intended the Transfiguration to be understood in some sense as the fulfillment of the promise. ²³ The fact only three of the disciples were privy to the vision explains the reference in the promise to "some." The three had "the privilege of seeing in the course of their natural life what others would only see at the final judgment." ²⁴ The emphasis in the Transfiguration account on the visual aspect correlates with the reference in the promise to "see." This interpretation also satisfies the usual meaning of the conjunction *heōs* ("until"), which implies that those who saw the kingdom come would die at some point thereafter. Perhaps most importantly, Peter understood the Transfiguration as a foreshadowing of the Parousia (2 Pet. 1:16-18). ²⁵

²¹ Turner (2008), 413.

²² "This was the interpretation of most of the Fathers, and it would also seem to have been Mark's understanding." W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew Volume II*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1991), 677. Recent commentators on Matthew who hold this view include Blomberg, 261; Keener, 436; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 641 (cautiously); and Turner, 413. Recent commentators on Mark who understand the Markan parallel (Mk. 9:1) to refer to the Transfiguration include Lane, 313-314; Walter W. Wessel, "Mark" in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:697-698; James A. Brooks, *Mark*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 138-140; Witherington, 261-262; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 345 (cautiously); and Stein, 410-411. Recent commentators on Luke who understand the Lukan parallel (Lk. 9:27) to refer to the Transfiguration include Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke" in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:924 (cautiously); Evans, 149; Stein, 280; and Green, 376.

²³ Michael Green states in *2 Peter and Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 92: "The Synoptic Gospels all see the transfiguration as a foretaste not so much of the resurrection as of the parousia of Jesus."

²⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield, quoted in Blomberg, 261 (fn. 8).

²⁵ Douglas Moo states in *2 Peter and Jude*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 84: "Peter, James, and John saw – not in a vision or a dream, but at a specific time and place in history – Jesus' Parousia glory. And Peter wants us to believe that Christ will come again in glory because he did see this." Thomas Schreiner states in *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary (Nashville:

B. Mat. 26:64 (ESV) (par. Mk. 14:62; Lk. 22:69) – ⁶⁴ *Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

Jesus is telling the Sanhedrin ("you" is plural) that though they are about to condemn him they soon will see him in a different light. As the present turning point plays out in his crucifixion and resurrection, they will see him exalted to God's right hand in that they will see things indicative of that exaltation, even if they do not fully grasp what they are seeing. They will see the three-hour darkness over all the land, the tearing of the temple curtain, the earthquake, the empty tomb, and dead saints raised to life, which events were sufficient to draw a confession from the centurion and his troops (Mat. 27:45-54), and will see the preaching, powerful works, and changed lives of the disciples.

Beyond that, and tied to his exalted status, they also will see the Parousia, the Son of Man returning to judge those who had unjustly judged him.²⁶ The fact they will long have been dead when that occurs does not mean they will not see it. All mankind, living and dead, will bear witness to that event in that all mankind will stand before his judgment throne (Mat. 25:31-46; Rom. 14:10; 2 Tim. 4:1). At his return, every being shall kneel in honor of his name and every tongue shall openly declare that he is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). Moreover, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31) suggests the possibility that even before they are resurrected the dead will be able to see what is transpiring beyond their lot in Hades.

C. Mat. 10:23 (ESV) – *When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

Broadman & Holman, 2003), 312: "Peter defended the truth of the coming of Christ in a surprising manner. He appealed to the eyewitness testimony of what occurred at the transfiguration. Apparently he conceived of the transfiguration as a proleptic and prophetic indication of the glory and power of Christ that would be displayed at his future coming." Peter Davids states in *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 202: "2 Peter . . . says that the Transfiguration was a view into the future of the coming exaltation of Jesus, a view of his second coming with power and glory." Gene Green states in *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 216: "The particular tenet of the heretics' teaching that Peter counters has to do with the eschatological parousia of Christ (v. 16; 3:3-4). He presents the transfiguration, with its revelation of Christ's kingship, as the guarantee of that final event."

²⁶ Nolland states (2005), 1131: "With only an adjustment from third person plural to second person plural, 'you will see the Son of Man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven', with its allusion to Dn. 7:13, repeats language from 24:30. It must, therefore, refer to the same event: the climax of history in the eschatological coming of the Son of Man to gather the elect." Robert H. Mounce states in *Matthew*, Good News Commentary (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 256: "a reference to the Parousia is quite clear." See also, Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 545; Blomberg, 403; Morris (1992), 685; W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew Volume III*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1997), 530-531; Keener, 650; and Turner, 640. Recent commentators on Mark who understand the Markan parallel (Mk. 14:62) to refer to the Parousia include Lane, 537; Wessel, 769; Gundry, 886-887; and Stein, 684-685.

This is a notoriously difficult text,²⁷ but I think Jesus is forewarning the church that Jewish hostility to the gospel will be an ongoing feature of its mission. On the heels of charging the disciples to evangelize Israel (10:5-6), Jesus tells them to flee from one town to the next when persecuted. He then solemnly informs them, in so many words, that the persecution that causes them to flee, that drives them from a town prematurely thus barring them full access to it, will to some extent remain until the time of his return. They will not finish all the towns of Israel, the Jewish mission, prior to that time because hostility will bar them, and perhaps eventually discourage them, from doing so.²⁸

²⁷ Carson (250) says it "is among the most difficult in the NT canon."

²⁸ This is or is similar to the view of Gundry (1982), 194-195; F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 108-109; Davies and Allison (1991), 190; Blomberg, 176; Keener, 324; and Turner (2008), 277. Turner (277) lists the following as plausible explanations:

1. Jesus will soon follow up on the ministry of the disciples. In this view, the coming is not eschatological but simply refers to Jesus's rejoining the disciples before they complete their immediate ministries.
2. Jesus's resurrection amounts to a coming, since by it the new era of the church is inaugurated (Albright and Mann 1971: 125; Stonehouse 1979: 240).
3. The coming of Jesus is a process beginning with the resurrection, continuing through Pentecost, and culminating in his return to earth (Hendricksen 1973: 467-68).
4. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 amounts to a coming in judgment upon Israel (Carson 1984: 252-53; Hagner 1993: 279-80).
5. Jesus will return to the earth before the disciples complete their mission to Israel (W. Davies and Allison 1991: 192; Blomberg 1992a; 176; Garland 1993: 112; Gnilka 1986-88: 1.379; Gundry 1994: 194-195; Harrington 1991: 147-48; Keener 1999: 324-25; Schnackenburg 2002: 98-99).