

# The End is Near

<sup>24:1</sup> Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.  
<sup>2</sup> 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."  
<sup>3</sup> 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?"  
<sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray.  
<sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.  
<sup>6</sup> 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.  
<sup>7</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.  
<sup>8</sup> All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.  
<sup>9</sup> "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.  
<sup>10</sup> And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.  
<sup>11</sup> And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.  
<sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.  
<sup>13</sup> But the one who endures to the end will be saved.  
<sup>14</sup> 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.

Matthew 24:1-14

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## The End! The End!

**STEPHEN WRIGHT** TELLS THE JOKE, "I drove by a guy on the side of the road with a sign that said, 'heaven.' So I hit him. I think he went there, he seemed like a pretty nice guy." People holding up signs about the end of the world have

become part of our shared American experience. Every movie about the end times has some gnarly dirty hobo holding up a sign saying, “The End is Near.” In yesterday’s paper, a comic about this came out about the Cubs and White Sox,



I remember when I was first told about the [vanishing hitchhiker](#). Scared me to death. It is a true story that happened to a friend of a friend. The guy was driving late at night on Hwy 2 and happened upon a tall, thin man wearing a long dark coat. He decided to give him a ride. As they got to talking, the man starting to say hysterically, “I’m here to tell you the end is here. Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming.” Suddenly, he vanished from the car. Later my friend’s friend

heard a police report saying that the same man had been picked up by 8 or 10 other people that same night and they all had the same story!

It was probably that same year, my freshman year at college (fall 1988), when the latest **apocalyptic thriller** written by a self-proclaimed prophecy expert had all of us students sleeping on top of our dorm roofs. You should have seen the campus during between the dates of Sept 11-13. The book was called, “**88 Reasons why the Rapture Could Be in 1988.**” It sold 4.5 million copies (there’s a lot of money to be made in this stuff you know). If you were not a Christian, it could scare the pants off you better than Stephen King, because this was *non-fiction* horror. On Rosh Hashana 1988, Jesus was going to return and it wasn’t up for debate. **Edgar C. Whisenant** was so confident in his mathematical computations that he wrote, “**Only if the bible is in error am I wrong, and I say that unequivocally. There is no way Biblical than I can be wrong; and I say that to every preacher in town.**”

TBN contributed to the hysteria by running tapes instructing non-Christians on what to do in case their Christian friends and relatives disappeared leaving them in a world thrust into the Great Tribulation. When the 13<sup>th</sup> came

and went, Whisenant suddenly discovered that his computations were two days off. It was the 15<sup>th</sup> of Sept! Then it became the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October etc. The next year he came out with a book called “[The Final Shout – Rapture Report 1989](#).” Then it was the Rapture Report 1990, then 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 etc. Whisenant died a prophetic failure and Christian whipping boy in 2001, having not seen the rapture occur in his lifetime.

These kinds of hysterical predictions have been common place since [Hal Lindsey](#) wrote his best seller, “[Late Great Planet Earth](#).” It was the #1 best selling non-fiction book of the 1970s. By 1990 it had sold 28 million copies. [John Walvoord](#) updated his book “[Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis](#)” just in time for the first Gulf War. [Harold Camping](#) came out with a book called “[1994](#)” where Jesus was supposed to return on Sept 6. [Grant Jeffrey](#) took advantage of the Y2K frenzy by publishing “[Appointment with Destiny](#).” And of course, we can’t forget the “[Left Behind](#)” series which to date has sold over 75 million copies.

This kind of thing has always been around, [but why so many books about the end times now?](#) Besides the massive amounts of profits to be made, it has its modern source in Dispensational theology which became the dominant

eschatology in America after WWII. Dispensationalism sees the modern day [state of Israel](#) as fulfillment of Bible Prophecy. After the atrocities of the Holocaust, perhaps out of world-wide guilt for what had happened to the Jews, in [1948](#) Israel was given its independence and the Jews began migrating *en masse* back to the Holy Land.

The idea is that once this event occurred, God's end-times clock started ticking. The [generation](#) that saw Israel become a nation would be the generation to see the rapture. This is taken from [Matthew 23:36](#) which says, "Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon *this* generation," and [Matthew 24:34](#), "Truly, I say to you, *this* generation will not pass away until all these things take place." According to Dispensationalism, "this generation" refers to the generation of the rapture.

A generation is usually defined as 40 years, which is fair enough. If you add 40 years to 1948... presto – 1988: One reason why the rapture should be in 1988. The problem is, there was no rapture in 1988. Yet, it is self-evident that Jesus *must* return soon for his church because Israel became a nation in accordance with Bible prophecy. It's just a matter of reading the apocalyptic clock correctly. Thus, the speculations continue. And they continue to fail. And they

will continue to fail until these people finally admit that the problem is not the Bible, but the failed *system*.

## Olivet Discourse

**Matthew 24**, the same place “**this generation**” comes up, begins the last of the five great discourses of our Lord in the book of Matthew. It is often referred to it as the **Olivet Discourse** because Jesus preaches a message on the Mt. of Olives which sits directly east of the city of Jerusalem. From the top of this mountain you have a perfect view of Jerusalem and the amazing temple that stood in its midst.

The Olivet Discourse is of particular interest to prophecy buffs because this is the place where the Lord Himself spells out the future. The Mt. of Olives is itself the perfect setting for such a sermon because it is associated with the future judgment in places like **Zechariah 14:4** which says, “**On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.**” This terrifying verse talks about the final coming of Messiah in victory.



The question that no one ever asked when I was growing up was, **whose future does Jesus have in mind?** It was just assumed that everything in this discourse was about *our* future, particularly *my* future in the next couple of years. But this is a question that should be asked. It cannot simply be assumed that everything in this discourse is about *my* future. Indeed, there are many good reasons to think that this is not the main point at all.

This is a difficult passage to wrap one's mind around. There are so many different interpretations of this sermon by Jesus that it would make your head spin if I told you about them all. Most of these interpretations are driven by a system. Because of this, the text often takes a back seat. If the system says it must be a certain way, then the text needs to be made to fit into that system.

This happens with Dispensationalists who read phrases like "this generation" as being about my generation rather than the one Jesus was talking to. Yet, there is no hint in the text that Jesus has anyone other than the disciples in mind. Yet, gaps and ages of time are thrown in between verses to account for why this is talking about us at the turn of the second millennium rather than the disciple's generation.

Their precious literal hermeneutic is stretched out like a garbage bag with too much trash in it.

It happens when they read **Matthew 24:21**, “Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (KJV). For a Dispensationalist, this about our future, a future 7 year tribulation for the Jews after the church is raptured out of here. Never mind that Jesus is talking about the destruction of the temple he had just came from which is verified by historical accounts of events in 70 AD.

Dispensationalists are not the only guilty party here. **Preterists**, who believe that *all* events in this chapter are past, can be guilty too. Many see the coming of the son of man in his *parousia* as having been fulfilled locally in Jerusalem in 70 AD. This leads what I call “hyper-preterists” to conclude that therefore the resurrection of the dead, the destruction of sin, and the new heavens and new earth are all here now.

I admit that this is a difficult passage to interpret. I’ve looked at all sorts of explanations of it from the fully past to the fully future. I’ve seen some say that Jesus switches back and forth, but their explanations seem arbitrary to me. Others talk about double fulfillments, trying to be honest with what has already happened and what they believe will



still happen in the future. I'm not sure about double fulfillments, because there are so many other prophecies that also come into play.

But I have come across an *exegetical* treatment of this passage that makes a lot of sense to me. I hope to explain it to you in these next weeks. Let me give you the general outline of it and then tell you what I hope to do. The general outline is as follows. **Matthew 24 concerns two questions.** One is about **the temple**. The other is about **the *parousia***. *Parousia* is a technical term (also a Greek word) that theologians use to refer to the second coming of Christ.

The disciples come to Jesus and ask him two questions in **Matthew 24:3**. “Tell us, when will these things be, *and* what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age.” Now, in the minds of the disciples, I'm very sure that they thought they were really asking two questions that had only one answer. That is, both questions, they thought, would be fulfilled at the same time (they were thinking like hyper-preterists). Why is this?

To answer that, you have to look at the context. These questions have a context! “**When will these things be?**” refers to something that Jesus has just said. Jesus has **just left the temple**. **Matthew 24:1** says that **Jesus left the temple and**

was going away, which his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. The temple structure in view here was the **second temple** also called Herod's temple. It was an immense complex and the temple itself was unlike anything in the ancient near east. It was spectacular and altogether wonderful. It was the heart and soul of Judaism. It represented their entire religion, indeed everything that it meant to be a Jew was wrapped up in the temple. If it is gone, then that has to be the end of all things.

Jesus says, “You see all these [buildings of the temple] do you not?” (2). “Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” Now, this subject has already come up. In fact, just verses before this Jesus had predicted that the house of the Pharisees would become desolate. “See, your house is left to you desolate” (**Matt 23:38**). So Jesus is picking that theme up here with the disciples. He is going to elaborate on what it means for the house of Israel – the temple – to become desolate (**I will talk more about this next week in the “abomination of desolations”**). “These things” that the disciples have in mind must therefore be about *the destruction of the temple*.

Just here, **Dispensationalism goes astray**. For they do not see any of this discourse (except **vs. 3**) as being about the destruction of the temple of Jesus' day. Scofield writes, "The answer to "what will be the sign of Your coming" is vv. 4-33."<sup>1</sup> In other words, as the *Prophecy Study Bible* says, "Jesus was speaking to his Jewish followers and warning of the prophetic signs that would occur just prior to his second coming."<sup>2</sup> This goes directly **against** this own stated most important hermeneutical principle: **Literal interpretation**.

A literal interpretation of Jesus' words is that he is talking about that structure he just came from, the one he sets the disciples on top of the Mount of Olives to get a good look at, the one that no longer exists because it has been utterly demolished. Jesus says, "You see all these buildings of the temple? Not one stone will be left upon another." The temple is going to be destroyed. So the disciples ask, "Tell us, when will these things be?"

But the disciples ask another question. "What will be the sign of the your coming and of the close of the age?"<sup>3</sup> The idea is that the disciples seem to think that if the temple is destroyed, then that's it. Its like the Cubs being in first place.

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<sup>1</sup> *Scofield Study Bible*, n. Matthew 34:3.

<sup>2</sup> *PSB*, n. Matthew 24:1-3.

<sup>3</sup> There are perhaps two questions here, but it makes little difference.

Hold up signs: “**The End is Near.**” You can understand why a Jew would think such a thing. The temple was everything to these people, and even the disciples did not yet understand that something greater than the temple is here (**Matt 12:6**). So they want to know what the sign of his coming will be at the close of the age.

Here is where it gets difficult. If you assume that the disciples are right, that there is no difference in time between the destruction of the temple and the *parousia*, then your interpretation will be guided by that assumption. This is where I think we need to do our best to let the *text* guide us. For Jesus counters this assumption in his answer. **First he will answer *when* the temple will be destroyed.** They ask for a time, they ask for signs and they get them! Jesus quite successfully predicts that within a single generation, the temple will be destroyed. This is **verses 4-35**. **Then Jesus turns his attention to answering the second question.** In answer to this question, he says, no one knows the day or the time of the *parousia*. Not even the Son, but only the Father (**Matt 24:36**). You can see from this that something has changed. First, Jesus knows exactly when the temple will be destroyed. Then he says he doesn't even know himself when he will return. Thus, **vs. 36** marks the beginning of

Jesus' answering the second question. This is marked off textually by the phrase “**But concerning that day...**” What day? Not the end of Jerusalem, but the end of *all things*.

Broadly speaking, then, this is the outline of the Olivet Discourse. Everything before **vs. 35** answers the question about the destruction of the temple. Everything after it answers the question about the parousia. I will get more into this in coming weeks. For the rest of *this* week, I want to get back to this idea of the signs of the times.

As I noted in the introduction, paranoia seems to strike people and a curious unhealthy speculative streak seems to come upon people about the return of Christ. This was just as true in Jesus' day as it is in our own. It would be just as true when the temple was destroyed as it is in our own day nearly 2,000 years later.

**What kind of speculations am I talking about?** How about **political intrigue**. A man comes into office that you don't like and you think Jesus return must be just around the corner. This is what I have come to call newspaper eschatology or paper-boy prophecy. I dubbed it that from an episode in my own life. I was having coffee with a youth pastor friend of mine on Nov 5, 1995. As we walked out of the store I happened by a news stand. I said to him, “**Look at**

that, Jesus' coming has to be close because yesterday they assassinated Yitzhak Rabin (Prime Minister of Israel)." He said, "Seriously?" I said, "Ummm, why not?" This morning I want to show you his answer as best I can according to the Scripture. But that story is the summary of Newspaper eschatology. "Extra-extra, read all about the signs of the times being fulfilled in today's news." **How many people are guilty of doing that today?** This may be a fun way to scare yourself for a weekend, but it is not a right way to interpret the Scripture.

How about **earthquakes**. A tsunami hits Indonesia and everyone over there thinks it's the end of the world. An earthquake hits China or Iran and kills hundreds of thousands of people, and this must be the end of all things. How about **hurricane** Katrina? She rips through New Orleans and everyone the few people that still have houses move to top of their roofs, not because their house is flooded, but because they want to see Jesus return in the sky. How about **heresy** in the church. Entire denominations go liberal, or abandon justification by faith alone, movements like the emerging church sweep away the faith of many through cunning deception and the faithful remnant respond is despondency saying that this is the end of it all. It can't get any worse.



Jesus is coming down out of the clouds as we speak. **Antichrists** take advantage of it all and deceive many people that they are the Messiah and so hundreds and thousands are led into apostasy.

**These speculations are not healthy.** In fact, they are quite **dangerous** to your spiritual health. They cause you to **lose sleep**. They cause you to **lose focus** of what is important here and now. Luther was once asked what he would do if he knew Jesus would return tomorrow. He said, “**I would plant a tree.**” Such a response seems almost nonsensical to us today. We are too much taken up with speculation to worry about such trivial and unimportant things like work or feeding our families.

Indeed, they cause the **love of many to grow cold**. Failed prophecies have a cumulative effect upon people. Sooner or later, people start to doubt the faith altogether. People give up meeting together. Churches lose hope in Christ, all because people are delving into the very things that Jesus warned us against doing!

Now, I’m trying to make this practical for us. But Jesus said this was a very practical lesson for his own disciples. I said that the answer to the question of the temple begins in **vs. 4** and this is true. But what applied to them about undo

speculations also applies today. What I want to do now is document the meaning of the events in **vs. 4-14**. As I do this I want to bring it home for you in a way that may you have not thought about before. Surely, there is warning here.

## **Birth Pains, Not the End**

As you start to read Jesus' answer to the question about the temple, you need to read what he says about these first events; things like **earthquakes, famines, wars** etc. Jesus refers to these things as **birth pains (24:8)**. Not until **vs. 15** does he talk about the actual sign of the end of the Jerusalem (**see also Luke 20:21, 24**). Until that sign occurs, all else is labor pains. Like new fathers who have never experienced a birth before, people will be tempted to think that these things *are the birth*, that the child is going to pop out right now, but they are not. This is terribly important to wrap your mind around.

Labor pains come and go with greater intensity and greater frequency until finally that last great pain is the end and the baby is born. The thing is, the baby is not yet born with these things. In fact, the baby may be many hours even days (or in eschatological terms years, decades, centuries)

away from being born though the labor has begun. These things are labor pains, not the birth itself. This is as true for the destruction of Jerusalem as it is for the coming judgment upon all mankind which that destruction was a type.

Importantly, Jesus says that when you see these things *do not* think this is the end (**vs. 6**). Ironically, this is exactly the opposite thing that most people do today. They think that when they see these things that this must be the end! They look at the supposed increase in earthquakes and famines and wars and think they have seen the vanishing hitchhiker. I'm not sure how much more tortured our interpretation of the Bible can get! I'm also quite convinced that these people don't know anything about world history.

## **AntiChrist's<sup>4</sup>**

First he says **see that no one leads you astray (4)**. Many false Christ's will come and lead many astray. This is a very ironic and important warning. It is ironic because many people today are led astray by just these things. Certain prophetic movements today are filled with false prophets and misunderstood warnings. It is important because Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> The following references come from Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 45ff.

tells us how not to be led astray into wild speculation, losing faith, and eventually apostatizing all together because of failed prophecies of Christ's return.

In the first century, prior to the destruction of the temple, many were led astray. Perhaps the most well known is Simon in **Acts 8**. It says, “there was a certain man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, ‘This man is what is called the Great Power of God. And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.’” **Jerome** quotes Simon as saying “I am the Word of God, I am the Comforter, I am Almighty, I am all there is of God.” **Irenaeus** tells how Simon claimed to be the Son of God and the creator of angels.

John summarizes what took place, “Many antichrists have come” (**1 Jn 2:18**). Growing up the way I did, this verse was never taught. I was taught only that there was “The” Antichrist. But John says that anyone who denies the Father and the Son (**1 Jn 2:22**), anyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (**4:3**) are deceivers (**2 Jn 1:7**) and antichrists. This is not future. It is past! And it is present!

Josephus tells about a man named Theudas who persuaded a great number to follow him to the river Jordan which he claimed would divide for their passage. Dositheus, a Samaritan, pretended that he was the lawgiver prophesied of by Moses. One writer notes, “There were so many of these impostors preying on the gullibility of the people that under the procuratorship of Felix, ‘many of them were apprehended and killed every day. They seduced great numbers of the people still expecting the Messiah; and well therefore might our Saviour caution his disciples against them.’” Apparently, the first century had just as many David Koreshs and Jim Jones as our own day.

## Wars and Rumors of Wars

Jesus talks about “wars and rumors of wars.” He says see that you are not alarmed, but this must take place, *but the end is not yet* (5). Alexander Keith writes, “The Jews resisted the erection of the statue of Caligula in the temple; and such was the dread of Roman resentment, that the fields remained uncultivated. At Caesarea, the Jews and Syrians contended for the mastery of the city. Twenty thousand of the former were put to death, and the rest were expelled. Every city in

Syria was divided into two armies, and multitudes were slaughtered. Alexandria and Damascus presented a similar scene of bloodshed. About fifty thousand of the Jews fell in the former, and ten thousand in the latter. The Jewish nation rebelled against the Romans; Italy was convulsed with contentions for the empire; and, as a proof of the troublous and warlike character of the period, within the brief space of two years, four emperors, Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, suffered death.”

**Tacitus** writes that prior to 70 AD there were “disturbances in Germany,” “Commotions in Africa,” “Commotions in Thrace,” “insurrections in Gaul,” “intrigues among the Parthians,” “war in Britain,” and “war in Armenia.” We tend to think that ours is the worst age of wards. But all this took place during *Pax Romana*. Some period of peace! Maybe that’s not quite what you thought the period of the early church was like!

## Famines

Jesus talks about famines in various places (7). **Acts 11** tells us, “Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood



up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.” Tacitus and Seutonius also mention famines during the period prior to 70 AD. It isn’t just Ethiopia or the southern United States that has famine. All famine is but a birth-pain and not the end itself!

## Earthquakes

Jesus talks about earthquakes (7). Acts 16:26 records “a great earthquake” that shook “the foundations of the prison house.” Secular writers record earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, Campania, Rome, and Judea. Pompeii was damaged by an earthquake on Feb 5, 63 AD. Josephus describes an earthquake in Judea of such magnitude “that the constitution of the universe was confounded for the destruction of men.” These things are not new to our day. Indeed, if the first century is any indication, they may not even be increasing in our day. What is increasing seems to be our ability to spot them and to have human beings be killed by them! Earthquakes are birth pains, not the end of the world.

# Tribulation and Suffering

Jesus turns his attention to the Disciples themselves (9). In this he makes an urgent plea to stand firm in difficult times. This is a main theme of all biblical apocalyptic literature. He says you will be delivered up to death and will be hated by all nations for Christ's name's sake. Peter and John were put in jail (Acts 4:3). They were warned not to speak to any man in the name of Jesus (4:17). They were flogged (5:40). Stephen was stoned to death (7:54-60). Saul was busy murdering Christians (9:1). James was killed with a sword (12:1-2). Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city (14:19). And this is only the beginning of what happened to the disciples of Christ in those days. You think you have it bad because Christians are not allowed to pray in public school? I think we need a little perspective. I don't think we yet know the meaning of tribulation and persecution. I pray we never will.

## Falling Away

Jesus said that there would be a falling away and a betraying of one another (10). Paul stated, "All who are in

Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Tim 1:15). Demas is said to have “loved this present world” and he deserted Paul (4:10). Paul says at another time, “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me” (4:16). There was so much persecution in those later days under Nero that Tacitus wrote, “several were seized who confessed, and then by their discovery a great multitude of others were convicted and barbarously executed.”

## False Prophets

Jesus talks about false prophets rising up and leading many astray (11). Peter records, “False prophets arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you” (2 Pet 2:1). Paul describes the Judaizing teachers as “false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (2 Cor 11:13). Hymanaeus and Philetus and those like them “will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene” (2 Tim 2:16-17). In Acts 20:29-30 the church is warned about “savage wolves who will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise,

speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” John says, “Many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). When we read these things today, we have a tendency to read them only about ourselves. But these things were all happening prior to 70 AD!

## Increased Lawlessness

Jesus talks about increasing lawlessness, such that the love of many will grow cold (12). Paul talks about such a shocking event that even the pagans don't do it. A man in the church at Corinth took his father's wife and was boasting about it (1 Cor 5:1-2). Hymanaeus and Philetus were spreading a word of ungodliness, encouraging sin in the congregation. Paul talks about certain men who came into the congregations and “captured weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions” (Tit 3:6). So what was the result? People deserted the faith. People grew indifferent to their first love. People gave up meeting together.

# Gospel Proclaimed

Jesus says that the gospel must be proclaimed throughout the whole world (14). I want to use biblical language in what I say next. At Pentecost there were Jews present “from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5-11). They took the gospel with them when they went home. Colossians 1:23 says, “The gospel was proclaimed in all creation under heaven.” Paul had just described how the gospel was “bearing fruit and increasing in all the world.” In Romans he says, “Your faith is being reported throughout all the world” (Rom 1:6). From tradition it appears that by 70 AD, the gospel had spread from Britain to India to Africa.

In our day of satellites and Google Earth, we read these passages through our lenses. This is probably not wrong. But when missiologists read this last sign as saying that we must preach in the 10-40 window to hasten the day of the Lord, we must not forget the near fulfillment of this passage which is chief is first in Jesus’ mind, as the destruction of the temple is the issue that he raised for the disciples.

We do ourselves a great disservice if we think that the gospel had not spread to the entire known world of that day. That’s what the Bible says. It spread far and it spread

quickly. The Apostles and disciples of that first generation were so zealous that by 70 AD nary a place in the Empire had been untouched by the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was a necessary prerequisite to the destruction of Jerusalem, if not also to the return of Christ. We need to listen to the words of the Scriptures on this and remember history. If these things may also refer to the return of Christ, it is only because this first judgment upon Jerusalem was a necessary precursor of the last judgment upon the world. Therefore, our evangelistic efforts ought to be driven by love for Christ, love for the lost, zeal and obedience to Christ's commission, and not simply so we can be raptured out of here, which seems to be the main emphasis of some people today.

Here is what I would like to leave you with today. We like to read passages about the last days about being about ourselves. Perhaps in this we can be guilty of what C.S. Lewis called chronological snobbery. We think ours is the only age that matters to God. Paul says, "In the last days there will come times of difficulty. People will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to the parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good,



treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people” (2 Tim 3:1-5). We look around. We see a LOT of these people, even in the church. And we say “Jesus is coming.”

But friends, these are the birth pains. They remind us that he is coming. But they are not the coming. It isn't immanent *just because* we are now at war with Iraq. The coming may be many years hence. *I believe it could be this very minute.* It is important to remember that Paul warned *Timothy* to stay away from these people. Paul was therefore saying that Timothy was in the last days.

Indeed, we are with Timothy in that regard. We are in the last days, which began with Jesus Christ come to earth. When you see these things, you are not to be frightened or alarmed, but are to have faith. You are not to speculate or give into the speculations of others. Such things can be gravely dangerous to your soul. Do not be lead astray! That is Jesus' very first warning about these things. You are to know that God predicts all these things will and must occur. These are the groaning of creation as she awaits her final consummation, and the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:19-21).

This is where you hope is to be, beloved. It is to be upon your Messiah, come already to forgive your sins to bring you near to God. Let me leave you with these glorious words from Romans 8, which teach you why the earth groans and moans in the ways Jesus has described:

We are heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.

(Rom 8:17-24)