

# THE FINAL END OF THE TEMPLE

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Matthew 24:1-3 says, “And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, *when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*” Jesus first warned his disciples not to be deceived about these things (Matt 24:4-5). This remains a relevant warning, as many today continue to try to discern “signs” of the Second Coming of Christ and predict an imminent end to this world. In particular, verses 6-34 are commonly misunderstood to pertain to the apostles’ *second* question, that of return of Christ and the end of the world. In fact, these verses answer the *first* question, that of the timing of Christ’s prophecy of the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. It certainly appears that the apostles associated Jerusalem’s fall with the end of the world. Therefore, in their minds, they were really only asking Jesus questions about one major event. However, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Roman general Titus and his army in the year 70 A.D. The end of the world is a separate event that has yet to occur.

## **Events prior to the coming of the Romans**

After Christ foretold that not one of the magnificent stones of the Jewish temple would be left upon another, it only makes sense that his disciples would first ask *when* that would happen. In Matthew 24:6-10, Jesus answered that question: “And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.” The events described in these verses, and the remainder of what Christ said down through verse 34 in this chapter, pertained to what would be taking place over the course of the next 40 years, culminating with the utter destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There would be such “normal” occurrences as the appearance of men falsely claiming to be Christ (Matt 24:4-5,23-26), other false prophets (Matt 24:11), wars and rumors of wars (Matt 24:6-7), famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places (Matt 24:7), and the persecution of Christians and the death of even some (if not most) of the apostles (Matt 24:8-10; see Acts 12:1-2; 2 Tim 4:6-8; 2 Pet 1:13-15 + John 21:18-19). Iniquity would abound during these years and the love of many would “wax cold” (Matt 24:12). There would be unprecedented tribulation (Matt 24:21-22). Jesus gave them four major warnings for these next 40 years: 1) do not believe or be deceived by the false Christs and false prophets (Matt 24:4-5.); 2) “see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet” (Matt 24:6); 3) endure to the end (Matt 24:13); and 4) pray, particularly that they

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would not have to flee Jerusalem in the winter or on the sabbath (Matt 24:20).

## **The sign of the fig tree**

The budding of the fig tree is a sign of the coming of summer (Matt 24:32). Similarly, Jesus gave signs that would tell his disciples of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:4-26). This destruction would bring a final end to the temple, the Aaronic priesthood, and the Israelite nation under the Law of Moses. Jesus said that that generation would not pass until “all *these things*” (i.e. the events pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple) were fulfilled (Matt 24:34). It would be preceded by signs that would warn men (specifically, Christ’s disciples) of its coming. Jesus gave two guidelines to generally pinpoint when the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple would occur. 1) Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt 24:14). The gospel was indeed preached in all the world before A.D. 70 (Col 1:6,23). 2) “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Matt 24:34). Forty years was certainly within the lifetime of many of those disciples, such as the apostle John. In Matthew 24:15, Jesus gave the sign of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem as “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso reads, let him understand).” As the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV defiled God’s temple in Jerusalem with sacrifices of swine to idols in 167 B.C. (Dan 8:9-14; 11:28-36), so also another would do likewise (Dan 9:24-27). In 70 A.D., Titus led the Romans into Jerusalem and he defiled the temple and then destroyed it along with the entire city. That is why Jesus gave another sign of the impending destruction of Jerusalem in Luke 21:20 that would go along with Titus’ desecration of the temple: “*And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.*” Jesus was foretelling the coming of the Roman armies led by Titus. A few days prior to this, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, he lamented over what would happen to her: “*For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another*” (Luke 19:43-44). When the disciples saw the Roman armies come and surround Jerusalem and Titus enter into the temple, that was their sign that Jerusalem was on the verge of destruction. At the time when the apostles saw those things come to pass, Jesus warned them to flee immediately: “*Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes*” (Matt 24:16-18). The Christians did indeed heed Christ’s warning and fled the Roman siege of Jerusalem to the city of Pella on the east side of the Jordan river. Thus, their living faith in the Lord’s prophecy caused them to be spared from those calamities that befell the Jews of Jerusalem.