

Mathew Chapter 24

1. And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

2. 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."

Origen: Every man also, who, by taking into him the word of God, is become a temple, if after sinning be yet retains in part the traces of faith and religion, his temple is in part destroyed, and in part standing. But he who after sin has no regard for himself is gradually alienated, until he has altogether forsaken the living God, and so one stone is not left upon another of God's commandments, which he has not thrown down.

3. 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?"

4. And Jesus answered and said unto them, "Take heed that no man deceive you.

5. For many shall come in my name, saying, 'I am Christ;' and shall deceive many."

Remig.: The Lord continuing His walk arrives at Mount Olivet, having by the way foretold the destruction of the temple to those disciples who had shewn and commended the buildings. When they had reached the Mount they came to Him, asking Him further of this.

Origen: They that are deceived are many, because "wide is the gate that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." [Matt 7:13] This one thing is enough to detect the Antichrists and seducers, that they shall say, "I am Christ," which Christ Himself is nowhere read to have said: for the works of God, and the word which He taught, and His power, were enough to produce belief that He is Christ.

For every discourse which professes to expound Scripture faithfully, and has not the truth, is Antichrist. For the truth is Christ, that which feigns itself to be the truth is Antichrist. So also all virtues are Christ, all that feigns itself to be virtue is Antichrist; for Christ has in Himself in truth all manner of good for the edification of men, but the devil has forged resemblances of the same for the deceiving of the saints.

We have need therefore of God to help us, that none deceive us, neither word nor power. It is a bad thing to find any one erring in his course of life; but I esteem it much worse not to think according to the most true rule of Scripture.

6. "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled : for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. [p. 803]

7. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

8. All these are the beginning of sorrows."

Chrys.: And because this might alarm the disciples, He continues, "See that ye be not troubled." And because they supposed that the end of the world would follow immediately after the war in which Jerusalem should be destroyed, He corrects their suspicions concerning this, "These things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

Origen: Or otherwise; As the body sickens before the death of the man, so it must needs be that before the consummation of this world the earth should be shaken, as though it were palsied, with frequent earthquakes, the air should gather a deadly quality and become pestilential, and that the vital energy of the soil should fail, and its fruits wither. And by consequence of this scarcity, men are stirred up to robbery and war. But because war and strife arise sometimes from covetousness, and sometimes from desire of power and empty glory, of these which shall happen before the end of the world a yet deeper cause shall be assignable.

For as Christ's coming brought through His divine power peace to divers nations, so it shall be on the other hand, "that when iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold," and God and His Christ shall desert them; wars shall be again when actions which beget wars are not hindered by holiness; and hostile powers when they are not restrained by the Saints and by Christ shall work unchecked in the hearts of men, stirring up nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

But if, as some will have it, famine and pestilence are from the Angels of Satan, these shall then gather might from opposite powers, when the salt of the earth, and the lights of the world, Christ's disciples, shall be no longer, destroying those things which the malice of daemons hatches. Ofttimes in Israel famines and pestilences were caused by sin, and removed by the prayers of the Saints. [marg. note: 1 Ki 17:1, Jer 14, James 5:17-18]

Well is that [p. 805] said, "In divers places," for God will not destroy the whole race of men at once, but judging them in portions, He gives opportunity of repentance. But if some stop be not put to these evils in their commencement, they will progress to worse, as it follows, "These all are the beginnings of sorrows," that is, sorrows common to the whole world, and those which are to come upon the wicked who shall be tormented in most sharp pains.

9. "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.

10. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

11. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

12. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

14. 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."

Origen: But how should the people of Christ be hated by the nations who dwelt in the uttermost parts of the earth? But one may perhaps say, that in this place all is put hyperbolically for many. But this that He says, "Then shall they deliver you," presents some difficulty; for before these things the Christians were delivered to tribulation. To this it may be answered, that at that time the Christians shall be more delivered to tribulation than ever.

And persons in any misfortune love to examine into the origin of them, and to talk about them. Hence when the worship of the Gods shall be almost deserted by reason of the multitude of Christians, it will be said that that is the cause of the wars, and famines, and pestilences; and of the earthquakes also they will say that the Christians are the cause, whence the persecution of the Churches.

Hilary: Such Was Nicolaus, one of the seven deacons, who led astray many by his pretences. And Simon Magus who, armed with diabolic works and words, perverted many by false miracles.

Remig.: For the Lord knew that the hearts of the disciples would be made sad by the destruction of Jerusalem, and overthrow of their nation, and He therefore comforts them with a promise that more of the Gentiles should believe than of the Jews should perish.

15. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

16. Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:

17. Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house.

18. Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.

19. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

20. But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:

21. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

Chrys.: As above He had obscurely intimated the end of Jerusalem; He now proceeds to a more plain announcement of it, citing a prophecy which should make them believe it.

Jerome: That, "Let him that readeth understand," is said to call us to the mystic understanding of the place. What we read in Daniel is this; "And in the midst of the week the sacrifice and the oblation shall be taken away, and in the temple shall be the abomination of desolations until the consummation of the time, and consummation shall be given upon the desolate." [Dan 9:27, septuagint]

Jerome: Or it may be understood of the statue of Caesar, which Pilate set up in the temple; or of the equestrian statue of Adrian, which stood to the present time in the very Holy of Holies. For, according to the Old Scripture, an idol is called 'abomination;' "of desolation" is added, because the idol was set up in the desolated and deserted temple.

23. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

24. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

25. Behold, I have told you before.

26. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

27. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

28. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

Jerome: Wherein He shews that His second coming shall be not in lowliness as His first, but in glory; and therefore it is folly to seek in places little and obscure for Him who is the Light of the whole world. [marg note: John 8:12]

Hilary: Notwithstanding, by reason of the great tribulation in which men shall be cast, false prophets promising to shew aid present from Christ, will falsely affirm that Christ is present in divers places, that they may draw into the service of Antichrist men discouraged and distracted.

Chrys.: He speaks here of Antichrist, and of certain his ministers, whom He calls false Christs and false prophets, such as were many in the time of the Apostles; but before Christ's second coming there shall come others more bitter than the former, "And they shall shew great signs and wonders." [2 Thes 2:9]

Aug., Lib. 83, Quaest., Q79: Here the Lord forewarns us that even wicked men shall do some miracles which the saints cannot do, yet are they not therefore to be thought to have a higher place in the sight of God. For the Egyptian magi were not more acceptable to God than the people of Israel, because they could do what the Israelites could not; yet did Moses, by the power of God, work greater things. This gift is not bestowed on all the saints, lest the weak should be led astray by a most destructive error, supposing such powers to be higher gifts than those works of righteousness by which eternal life is secured. And though magi do the same miracles that the saints do, yet are they done with a different end, and through a different authority; for the one do them seeking the glory of God, the others seeking their own glory; these do them by some special compact or privilege [marg. note: al. veneficia] granted to the Powers, within their sphere, those by the public dispensation and the command of Him to whom all creation is subject [ed. note: see above on chap. vii, 22].

For it is one thing for the owner of a horse to be compelled to give it up to a soldier, another for him to hand it over to a purchaser, or to give or lend it to a friend; and as those evil soldiers, who are condemned by the imperial discipline, employ the imperial ensigns to terrify the owners of any property, and to extort from them what is not required by [p. 818] the public service; so some evil Christians, by means of the name of Christ, or by words or sacraments Christian, compel somewhat from the Powers; yet these, when thus at the bidding of evil men, they depart from their purpose, they depart in order to deceive men in whose wanderings they rejoice.

It is one way then in which magi, another in which good Christians, another in which bad Christians, work miracles; the magi by a private compact, good Christians by the public righteousness, evil Christians by the signs of public righteousness. [marg. note: non occ.] And we ought not to wonder at this when we believe not unreasonably that all that we see happen is wrought by the agency of the inferior powers of this air.

29. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

30. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn."

Origen: One will say, As at the breaking out of great conflagrations, great darkness is at the first caused by the smoke, so when the world shall be consumed by fire, which shall be kindled, even the great luminaries shall be darkened; and when the light of the stars is decayed, the rest of their substance, incapable of exaltation, shall fall from heaven into what it was, when it was first raised aloft by the light.

When this shall have taken place, it follows that the rational heavenly powers shall suffer dismay and derangement, and shall be suspended from their functions. "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven," that sign by which the heavenly things were made, that is, the power which the Son wrought when He hung upon the cross. And the sign shall appear in heaven, that men of all tribes [p. 823] who before had not believed Christianity when preached, then by that sign, acknowledging it as made plain, shall grieve and mourn for their ignorance and sins.

Others will think otherwise, that as the light of a lamp dies away by degrees, so when the supply of the heavenly luminaries shall fail, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon and the light of the stars shall grow dim, and that which in their composition is earthy shall fall from heaven. But how can it be said of the sun that its light shall be darkened, when Esaias the Prophet declares, that in the end of the world, there shall be light proceeding forth from the sun? [Isa 30:26]

And of the moon he declares that it shall be as the sun. But concerning the stars, there are some that endeavour to convince us that all, or many of them, are larger than the whole earth. How then shall they fall from heaven, when this earth would not be large enough to contain them?

[30] "And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Origen: Therefore shall they see with the bodily eyes the Son of Man, coming in human shape, "in the clouds of heaven," that is, on high. As at the transfiguration, a voice came out of the cloud, so when He shall come again transformed into His glorious appearance, it shall be not on one cloud, but upon many, which shall be His chariot. And if when the Son of God went up to Jerusalem, they who loved Him spread their garments in the way, not willing that even the ass that carried Him should tread upon the earth; what wonder, if the Father and God of all should spread the clouds of heaven under the body of the Son, when He comes to the work of the consummation?

And one may say, that as in the creation of man, God took clay from the earth and made man; so to manifest the glory of Christ, the Lord taking of the heaven, and of its substance, gave it a body [p. 826] of a bright cloud in the Transfiguration, and of bright clouds at the Consummation; wherefore it is here said, "in the clouds of heaven," as it was there said, "of the clay of the ground." [Gen 2:7]

And it behoves the Father to give all such admirable gifts to the Son, because He humbled Himself; and He has also exalted Him, not only spiritually, but bodily, that He should come upon such clouds; and perhaps upon rational clouds, that even the chariot of the glorified Son of Man should not be irrational.

At the first, Jesus came with that power with which He wrought signs and wonders in the people; yet was that power little in comparison of that great power with which He shall come in the end; for that was the power of one emptying Himself of power. And also, it is fitting that He should be transformed into greater glory than at the transfiguration on the mount; for then He was transfigured for the sake of three only, but in the consummation of the whole world, He shall appear in great glory, that all may see Him in glory.

31. "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Chrys. The sound of the trump refers to the resurrection, and the rejoicing, and to represent the astonishment which shall be then, and the woe of those that shall be left, and shall not be snatched up into the clouds.

Origen: It is written in Numbers, that the Priests shall summon by the sound of the trumpet from the four winds those who are of the camp of Israel [Num 10:3], and it is in allusion to this that Christ speaks here of the Angels, "And they shall gather together the elect from the four winds."

32. "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

33. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

34. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

35. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Aug., Quaest. Ev., i, 39: Or, by the fig tree understand the human race, by reason of the [p. 830] temptations of the flesh. "When its branch is tender," i.e. when the sons of men through faith in Christ have progressed towards spiritual fruits, and the honour of their adoption to be the sons of God has shone forth in them.

Chrys.: All these things therefore mean what was said of the end of Jerusalem, of the false prophets, and the false Christs, and all the rest which shall happen down to the time of Christ's coming, That He said, "This generation," He meant not of the men then living, but of the generation of the faithful; for so Scripture uses to speak of generations, not of time only, but of place, life, and conversation; as it is said, "This, is the generation of them that seek the Lord." [Ps 24:6]

Herein He teaches that Jerusalem shall perish, and the greater part of the Jews be destroyed, but that no trial shall overthrow the generation of the faithful.

Jerome: Or, by "generation" here He means the whole human race, and the Jews in particular. And He adds, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," to confirm their faith in what has gone before; as though He had said, it is easier to destroy things solid and immovable, than that aught should fail of my words.

36. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

37. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39. And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

40. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

Jerome: Having then shewn that the Son of God cannot be ignorant of the day of the consummation, we must now show a cause why He should be said to be ignorant. When after the resurrection He is demanded concerning this day by the Apostles, He answers more openly; "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in his own power." [Acts 1:7] Wherein He shews that Himself knows, but that it was not expedient for the Apostles to know, that being in uncertainty of the coming of their Judge, they should live every day as though they were to be judged that day.

Chrys.: That you may perceive that it is not owing to ignorance that He is silent of the day and hour of the judgment, He brings forward another token, "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." By this He means that He shall come sudden and unlooked for, and while men are taking their pleasure; of which Paul also speaks, "When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them." [1 Thess 5:3]

42. "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

43. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

44. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."

[p. 836]

Jerome: Having declared that "of that hour knoweth no man, but the Father only," He shews that it was not expedient for the Apostles to know, that being ignorant they might live in perpetual expectation of His coming, and thus concluding the whole, He says, "Watch

therefore, &c." And He does not say, 'Because we know not,' but "Because ye know not," shewing that He Himself is not ignorant of the day of judgment.

Chrys.: In this He rebukes such as have less care for their souls, than they have of guarding their money against an expected thief.

45. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

46. Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

47. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

48. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;

49. And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; [p. 838]

50. The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,

51. And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Chrys.: And He instructs His hearer not only by the honour which awaits the good, but by the punishment which threatens the wicked, adding, "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, &c."

Origen: And every Bishop, who ministers not as a fellow servant, but rules by might as a master, and often an harsh one, sins against God; also if he does not cherish the needy, but feasts with the drunken, and is continually slumbering because his Lord cometh not till after long time.

Jerome: "The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for Him," is to rouse the stewards to watchfulness and carefulness. "He shall cut him in sunder," is not to be understood of execution by the sword, but that he shall sever him from the company of the saints.

Aug., Ep. 199, in fin.: Putting aside this wicked servant, who, there is no doubt, hates his Master's coming, let us set before our eyes these good servants, who anxiously expect their Lord's coming. One looks for His coming sooner, another later, the third confesses his ignorance of the matter.

Let us see which is most agreeable to the Gospel. One says, Let us watch and pray, because the Lord will quickly come; another, Let us watch and pray, because this life is short and uncertain, though the Lord's coming may be distant; and the third, Let us watch, because this life is short and uncertain, and we know not the time when the Lord will come. What else does this man say than what we hear the Gospel say, "Watch, because ye know not the hour in which the Lord shall come?" All indeed, through longing for the kingdom, desire that that should be true which the first thinks, and if it should so come to pass, the second and third would rejoice with him; but if it should not come to pass, it were to be feared that the belief of its supporters might be shaken by the delay, and they might begin to think that the Lord's [p. 842] coming shall be, not remote, but never. He who believes with the second that the Lord's coming is distant will not be shaken in faith, but will receive an unlooked for joy. He who confesses his ignorance which of these is true, wishes for the one, is resigned to the other, but errs in neither, because he neither affirms or denies either.