

Matthew 24: Introduction

Old Testament prophecy was conditional. There can be no doubt about that. Take these words: "Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel: an end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end is come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee" (Ez. 7:2,3). But the ultimate end did not come then in Ezekiel's time and the Babylonian destruction of the temple. God's program delayed that ultimate end. Perhaps because of His mercy, the repentance of a remnant, or for other reasons as yet unknown to us and unseen from our earthly viewpoint. My approach to the Olivet prophecy is that it was intended to be fulfilled in the first century- because this was the intended time [or one of the intended times] for the Lord's second coming and the establishment of the Kingdom. Therefore those aspects of the predictions which depended upon God to fulfil, He did [e.g. earthquakes, famines]. But the essential preconditions of Israel's repentance and the spread of the Gospel worldwide were not fulfilled. And so the prophecy has been rescheduled and reapplied to some later time- and it would appear that time is now upon us. This approach may be new to some, for it involves understanding God as 'open', and more responsive to human behaviour than we might have thought. If this is something you feel the need to still get your mind around, then the digression about the nature of prophecy may be helpful. If you have no problem with the idea of God's prophetic word being delayed or rescheduled in its fulfilment, then the digression doesn't need to be read.

We need not get overly worried about the supposed discrepancies between prophecy and its historical fulfillment. Such differences don't negate the Divine inspiration of the original prophecy- rather do they show how God's intentions can be worked out in different ways because of the open-ended approach He takes to human response. Thus it's been observed that the siege of Jerusalem in AD66-70 doesn't exactly follow the descriptions in Lk. 19:41-44 and 21:20-24. This would be because there were within the Olivet prophecy a number of possible scenarios of what could happen *if* the believers fled the city as commanded; and of course, *if* Israel repented and accepted Christ at His AD70 'coming' in judgment. Additionally we must remember that this prophecy was only having its initial fulfillment in AD70- the final fulfillment will be in our last days.

Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet prophecy alone a highly illegal document (1).

24:1 *Departed from the temple*- This was a visual depiction of the Lord's previous statement that the house of the temple was now left desolate (23:38). The Lord surely had in mind how the glory of God, which was Him (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:27; James 2:1), progressively left the temple in Ezekiel's time, until the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple (Ez. 10:18), and how the loss of the ark (another symbol of the Lord Jesus) was the glory departing from Israel (1 Sam. 4:21,22).

Came to Him- We sense a separation between the Lord and the disciples. His hint that the temple was to be desolated (23:38) was hard for them to accept. They were probably embarrassed that their teacher had spoken out against the quintessential symbol of Judaism, the temple; which would explain why they come to Him "privately" for more explanation (:3). And in :3 they again 'come to Him', as if they moved away from Him after His confirmation in :2 that He did indeed intend to be understood as saying that the temple would be cast down.

To shew Him the buildings- Mark says that *one* of the disciples said: "Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings!". This may well have been Peter, as Mark appears to be Peter's gospel. It was his response to the Lord's previous comment that this house was effectively desolate already (23:38), so sure was God's forthcoming judgment upon it. And Peter is perhaps saying 'What a shame that would be- it's such a wonderful building!'. In this we would see, therefore, another example of Peter, the leader of the early church, being somewhat out of sync with the Lord's intentions- another hint at the weakness of the disciples.

Buildings of the temple- These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the building up [often translated 'edifying'] of a new temple, comprised of the believers in Christ. The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

24:2 *Do you not see all these things?*- AV "See ye not all these things?". Read this carefully. He doesn't say 'Do you see all these things?'. He uses the negative- 'Do you *not* see all these things?'. This isn't mere style or literary convention. To not see something means you do not see it. Let's not assume that "all these things" refers to the temple building. The Lord has just used the term

in 23:36: "All these things shall come upon this generation". And *pas tauta*, "all things", runs as a triple refrain throughout the Olivet prophecy, concerning the 'all things' of the predicted time of crisis coming upon Israel (24:8,33,34). If reading in context means anything, the "all things" must refer not to the temple buildings, but to the "all things" of Jerusalem's coming judgment. The Lord is asking them: 'Do you not see / perceive that all these judgments ["all things"] must come upon these wonderful buildings you're showing Me? No? Then OK, I will spell out those "all things" in gruesome detail. Don't look at the world as it stands before you at this moment, but remember the "all things" of judgment to come which are spoken about them". The Lord has previously condemned the Jewish world for 'not seeing' and He is warning the disciples that again they may be so influenced by Judaism that they don't 'see' the judgments to come with the eye of faith in His word. See later in this verse on *Left here*.

Left here- This again expands upon His previous use of this word in 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place').

Not... one stone upon another- The judgment of the leprous house (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

Thrown down- There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when they ask when this shall be, and what sign would indicate the end of the age (:3). This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, an house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of

the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

24:3 *As He sat*- The word picture is painted of the Lord sitting alone, and then the disciples come to Him. Again we sense the separation between the Lord and His followers. Matthew gives much attention to the Lord sitting (13:1,2; 15:29; 22:44). This is what we would expect of a genuine eyewitness who recalled the Lord's body language and movements.

The disciples- Mk. 13:3 defines them as strictly Peter, James, John and Andrew. Hence they came "privately".

Came to Him privately- See on :1 *Came to Him*.

The sign- They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4).

Your coming- Without doubt, *parousia* is used in the NT and contemporary literature to refer to a literal and not an invisible presence (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:10; Phil. 1:26; 2:12). Any 'coming' of the Lord in Jerusalem's judgment of AD70 was only at best a foretaste of His final coming. It's simply not good enough to claim that He 'came' invisibly or spiritually. The word *parousia* simply doesn't mean this. And yet the destruction of the temple and His 'coming' are linked together; hence my conclusion that His *parousia* was delayed and the prophetic program delayed and rescheduled.

The end of the age- See on :2 *Thrown down*. They saw this as parallel with His 'coming' and the destruction of the temple. There is no suggestion that they saw these as three different chronological events, and the Lord's answers give no hint that He saw them as distinct events. Quite simply, the Lord's second coming and the destruction of the temple were understood by them all, the Lord included, as simultaneous. The fact the Lord's coming didn't occur when the temple was destroyed can only therefore mean that the Divine program was rearranged. For

preterism notwithstanding, the Lord has clearly not returned in glory yet, neither did He do so in AD70. "The end of the age" had been used by the Lord to describe the last day of judgment (Mt. 13:39,40, as also Dan. 12:4,7 LXX). The very same phrase used in 13:39,40,49 with clear reference to the Lord's second coming. In no way was the separation between true and false believers, and the punishment of all the latter class, achieved in AD70. The phrase is also used in 28:20, where the Lord sends out the disciples on their great preaching mission with the assurance that He will be with them "unto the end of the age". The implication could be that the end of the age is dependent upon the fulfilment of the great commission. The disciples failed in this, both in performing it [because of their initial hang up about preaching to Gentiles] and because of the paucity of response to their work. And so the end of the age, the second coming, is yet to come- when the Gospel really does go into all the world, then the end shall come (:14). Heb. 9:26 uses the phrase with reference to the situation in the first century- "now once in the end of the age has [Christ] appeared". It could have come then- but it did not. Rom. 9:28 speaks of how God will have to finally intervene in speeding things up- and Paul writes here in the context of Israel's final response to the Gospel: "He will end [s.w.] the work, and cut it short". And the word for "end" is also used to describe how God will end or finally execute the new covenant with Israel (Heb. 8:8)- when they accept that new covenant in responding to the Gospel. Clearly the global preaching of the Gospel and Israel's response to it are crucial requirements for the "end of the age" to come. And there is no lack of evidence that these signs are on the cusp of fulfilment.

Usually, the Lord didn't reply directly to questions (in this case, "When...?"); He gave answers which branched out into something altogether more comprehensive than the original question (Consider Mt. 13:10,11; 15:2,3; Mk. 10:4,5; Lk. 17:20; Jn. 3:4,5; 4:9,10; 6:28,29; 8:53,54; 11:8,9; 14:22,23). *Nearly every example of the Lord Jesus answering a question includes this feature.* To the disciples, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the age- it was a calamity. They assumed that if the temple was destroyed, it must be replaced immediately by their Jesus coming again with his Messianic Kingdom. Their minds were still not suitably distanced from their Judaist background. They asked *one* question: "When shall these things (the destruction of the temple) be? And what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" (Mk. 13:4). Mt. 24:4 can make it seem that they asked two questions: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?". But the parallel record in Mk. 13:4 makes it clear that actually these were parts of the same question concerning the temple's destruction. To the disciples, the coming of Christ, the end of the world and the temple's destruction were all the same event. It could be that the Lord answered their question by speaking of how there would be the destruction of the temple, but His real coming and the final ending of this world would be at a future date. His answer was therefore fundamentally relevant to his second coming, although built into it was some reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70. As He so often does, the Lord turned round the terms of the question. They thought his "coming" would be at the temple's destruction, and so they asked for signs of His "coming". But Christ shows that this wasn't a correct view: His real "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30) would not be then, but after all the

various signs he described were fulfilled. He was surely saying: 'OK the temple will be destroyed, and many of the signs I'm giving will have some application to that period; but the destruction of the temple isn't the sign of my coming. Note the signs I give you, and watch for their fulfilment: and *then* you'll know when to expect my coming'.

When the disciples asked "When shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Lk. 21:7), the Lord didn't cut short the conversation by saying 'Well actually you can't know, so your question isn't appropriate'. He gave them just what they asked for: signs whereby the faithful would know "when these things shall come to pass". The primary application of all this was that the faithful knew exactly the approaching end of the Jewish age in AD70- everything went according to plan, for those who correctly understood the prophecies. Therefore James, Peter and Paul could assuredly teach that "the judge standeth before the door" (James 5:9) etc. And it is apparent that the situation in the run up to AD70 was typical of that in our last days. Likewise, the position of the faithful remnant in Babylon at the time of the restoration is another type of latter day events. And they too had an opening of their eyes to the prophetic word, resulting in an ability to clearly see where they were, and that the time of restoration of Israel's Kingdom was imminent. 'What will be the signs of the last days?' was indeed answered quite directly, but building up to a personal, incisive appeal to pray constantly that we will be preserved from those horrors and be accepted before the final judgment seat of God's Son (Lk. 21:7,36). It was as if the Lord was adding a powerful caveat- as if to say 'Now don't go and get obsessed and distracted trying to match these signs to current events- worry about how *you* will survive the last days, and whether, when you stand before Me in the very end, you will stand or fall before Me'. And 'Are you really the Messiah? Do you really fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies?' was met by an appeal to not stumble in faith (Lk. 7:21-23).

24:4 *Deceive*- A major theme in the Lord's message here (:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed, Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority. "Be not deceived" (Lk. 21:8) is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers Christ spoke of were not just bogus

Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

24:5 *Come in My Name*- Coming in the name of the Lord was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ", is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

Deceive many- The reader who pays attention to detail will note a significant use of pronouns in the Olivet prophecy: "ye" seems to refer to the faithful minority, who would (e.g.) understand, be persecuted, perish, lift up their heads, and finally endure to the end. "The many" (Gk. the majority) in the ecclesia would fall away. No fewer than four times does the Lord stress that "the majority" would be deceived by false prophets, be offended, and have their love wax cold (Mt. 24:5,10,11,12). Probably he connected this, at least in his own mind, with his earlier statement that "the many" would be called to his truth, but not chosen (Mt. 22:14). This difference between "the many / majority" in the ecclesia and the minority of suffering faithful is a theme in the parables which are an appendix to the Olivet prophecy.

The persecution of God's people was spoken of by the Lord as being one of the clearest signs. And he also emphasized that apostasy within the ecclesia would be the other major sign. When they asked him for the signs, Mk. 13:5 says that Jesus *began* by warning them of deception from false teachers. The way the NT writers allude to this passage indicates that they saw this deception as not coming from the crazy bogus-Messiahs of the world, but from false teachers *within the ecclesia*, sometimes supported by apparent possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; Tit. 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). A state of total ecclesial apostasy was the sign which Jesus *began* with, according to Mk. 13:5.

I am Christ- Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when “The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events” [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

DIGRESSION 23: The Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16) and the Olivet Prophecy

The Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16)	The Olivet Prophecy
Jn. 13:1- the death of Christ.	"The end" Mt. 24:6- the coming of Christ.
Birth pangs- the sufferings of Christ and of the believer in life. "A woman when she is in labour has... anguish... in the world you shall have tribulation" (Jn. 16:21,33).	Birth pangs (Mt. 24:8)- The pains of the tribulation sufferings.
“Whoever kills you will think that he does God service” (Jn. 16:2)	Some of you will be killed (Mt. 24:9)
Believers will be “hated... for My Name’s sake” just because they are in Christ; such experience is inevitable throughout our lives (Jn. 15:18,21).	“Hated... for My Name’s sake” (Mt. 24:9)
Cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2)	You shall be beaten in the synagogues (Mk. 13:9)
Strength not to be offended (Jn. 16:1)	Many offended (Mt. 24:10)
<i>Hupomeno</i> [“endure”] is a form of <i>meno</i> , the word used so often by the Lord in the upper room discourse for ‘abiding’ or remaining in Him. Again, it seems John has replaced the Olivet prophecy’s call to endure to the end of the tribulation period with an appeal for the believer to abide / endure in Christ to the end of life. The language of the tribulation is applied to the entirety of the Christian’s life.	Endure to the end (Mt. 24:13)- <i>Hupomeno</i>
“Let not <i>your</i> heart be troubled” (Jn. 14:1)... “neither be afraid” (Jn. 14:27)	<i>Men’s</i> hearts failing them for fear (Lk. 21:26)... “See that <i>you</i> are not troubled” (Mt. 24:6)
“I will come again and receive you unto Myself” (Jn. 14:3); the context requires that this ‘coming again’ is in the resurrection of Christ. For He is explaining that He is going	The second coming of Christ and the gathering of believers to Him by the Angels (Mt. 24:30,31).

away to death, but will come again from there. His resurrection was, in essence, was His 'coming again'.	
"I have told you before it comes to pass" (Jn. 14:29).	"I have told you before" (Mt. 24:25).
The unfruitful branch is "taken away" from the vine of Israel (Jn. 15:2)	The same word is used for how the final judgments will 'take away' the unGodly (Mt. 24:39)
The branch of the vine [a symbol of Israel] that must bear fruit (Jn. 15:4); spiritual fruit on spiritual Israel	The tender branch of the fig tree [symbol of Israel] that must bear fruit before Christ returns (Mt. 24:32); spiritual fruit on natural Israel
The 'gathering' of the branches (Jn. 15:6)	The gathering of the responsible to judgment (Mt. 24:31) and of the eagles to the carcass (Mt. 24:28)
The Father is glorified by bringing forth spiritual fruit in this life- not simply by the physical coming of Christ in visible glory (Jn. 15:8)	Christ's coming on the clouds of Heaven with great power and glory- i.e. the Father's glory (Mt. 24:31)
"Love [<i>agape</i>] one another" (Jn. 15:17)	The <i>agape</i> of the majority shall become cold (Mt. 24:12)
The world will hate you if you are in Christ (Jn. 15:18). "The world hates you" (Jn. 15:19)- because we are in Christ. The experience of the tribulation period was already being experienced by the disciples, and will be throughout the lives of all in Christ.	Hated of all nations (Mt. 24:9)
"They will also persecute you" (Jn. 15:20)- not just in the tribulation, but in life, because Christ was "persecuted" and we are in Him, sharing His experiences.	The same word in Lk. 21:12 "They shall persecute you" in the final tribulation period.
"You shall bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning" (Jn. 15:27). Their witness was not just going to be in the tribulation- the witness was to be made by all believers at all times because of their personal experience of Jesus.	During the tribulation period, the Gospel will be preached as a witness [s.w.] to the world (Mt. 24:14)
"He will show you things to come", literally, 'the coming [one]' (Jn. 16:13 s.w.). The Comforter, the spirit of Christ, His personal presence within the believer, would declare to them the coming of Christ- rather than seeking to match current events to the words of the Olivet prophecy. This would be the equivalent of the day star arising in the hearts	The literal 'coming' of Christ (Mt. 24:30,42,44,46,48 s.w.), heralded by the fulfilment of signs in the world / Israel.

<p>of believers, to tell us that Christ is about to come (2 Pet. 1:19).</p>	
<p>“He shall glorify Me” (Jn. 16:14). The glory of the Lord Jesus at His return can be experienced in the transformed life today.</p>	<p>The Son of Man coming in glory (Mt. 24:30)</p>
<p>“You shall weep and lament” (Jn. 16:20)</p>	<p>The tribes of Israel will weep (Mt. 24:30)</p>
<p>“In the world you shall have tribulation” (Jn. 16:33)- the essence of the tribulation is to be lived out in our lives.</p>	<p>The tribulation of the final period of testing (Mt. 24:9,21,29 s.w. three times).</p>
<p>The Comforter, the presence of Jesus in the hearts of the believers which would be effectively as good as His physical presence. It would come or be sent from the Father (Jn. 15:27) just as Christ would be at His second coming.</p>	<p>When the potential, intended coming of Christ in the first century was rescheduled, John didn't want the believers to lose heart. He therefore is saying that through the Comforter, the Lord is in spiritual essence with us. This teaching is sorely needed for those who see their whole lives in terms of studying Bible prophecies and hoping for the Lord's physical coming in their lifetimes, often with very little personal sense of Jesus as being a present reality in their lives, stuck in a Christianity without Christ, because He is seen as absent and far away. Errors of interpretation and disappointments can destroy faith. But they have missed the essence- that Christ has 'come' to us already through the Comforter. The upper room discourse was given maybe 24 hours after the Olivet prophecy; clearly the Lord intended it to be a clarification and expansion upon the Olivet prophecy, as if to say 'The things I told you on Olivet really can happen, although there are some conditions; but the essence of what I said there, in personal spiritual terms, is true for you for all time'. But the written form of the upper room discourse was only released by John, under inspiration, some time later than the Olivet prophecy, after the coming of Christ had already clearly been rescheduled.</p>

Digression 25: Conditional Prophecy in Daniel

The Olivet prophecy quotes and alludes to various parts of Daniel's prophecy, and yet the Olivet prophecy's intended fulfilment in AD70 didn't happen as was potentially possible, and was rescheduled. This therefore implies that Daniel's prophecies, which are alluded to, are thereby capable of a similar more elastic fulfilment. And looking in more detail at Daniel, this does indeed seem to be the case. Daniel prophesied whilst Judah were in captivity, and the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are full of potential prophecies of how the Messianic Kingdom could have been established at Judah's return after 70 years in Babylon. Ezekiel's conditional prophecy of the temple system is a parade example, although this was more commandment than prediction. I have discussed this in great detail in *The Exiles*. I suggest that like the Olivet prophecy, the prophecies of Daniel were an outline of a potential schema of events that could have taken place, leading up to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. But due to Judah's overall preference to remain in Babylon, and the lethargy of those who did return, that schema was rescheduled and was given a longer term application over history, culminating in the events of [our?] last days and the final, inexorable establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth.

As is well established, Daniel's prophecies are interrelated. The metals of the opening vision in Daniel 2 develop into the beasts of Daniel 7, and the other prophecies give more details of potential fulfilments and developments of the beast systems, culminating in the war between the Kings of the North and South and the final revelation of Israel's triumphant Messiah and the resurrection in Daniel 12. The sequence of metals in the image of Daniel 2 speak primarily of four kings, each having a king-dom, a dominion over which they reigned. And they all form part of the image of an individual *man*. Nebuchadnezzar personally, rather than the Babylonian empire, was represented by the head of gold (Dan. 2:38). The ten toes of the image represent "kings" (Dan. 2:44 "in the days of these kings"). The prophecy started to be fulfilled- for in Daniel's lifetime, the head of gold, Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty, gave way to Darius the Mede (Dan. 5:31), and still in Daniel's lifetime, to Cyrus the Persian (Dan. 6:31). But even that sequence need not have happened the way it did if Nebuchadnezzar had repented more quickly; if he had, there would have been a "lengthening of your tranquillity" (Dan. 4:27). If he had, perhaps the next metal of the image would have followed him directly, rather than following his son. The time period intended for him could have been changed. The same word translated "lengthening" occurs only again in Dan. 7:12, where we read that the beasts had their "lives *prolonged* for a season and time". Their intended time periods were added to. The setting up of God's Kingdom on the earth / land of Israel was exactly what had been prophesied in Jeremiah and Ezekiel as happening once the captivity in Babylon had ended; at that time, the stone could have hit the earth and destroyed the situation envisaged in the image of Daniel 2. But this intended sequence of four kings followed by ten kings didn't come about as intended. That captivity was intended to last for 70 years, but in reality it lasted longer- hence Daniel's confusion and pleading with God in Daniel 10 to do what He had promised. And yet his prayer of Daniel 9 suggests that he realized Judah's sins were such, and their lack of real repentance in Babylon was such, that the restoration program had been delayed. His response to understanding the 70 year period is to pray to God admitting Israel have sinned and are still impenitent- as if he realized this was why the period had been extended (Dan. 9:2,3). In Dan. 9:19 he asks for God to forgive, to accept his repentance on Judah's behalf, and therefore not to "defer" or delay any longer. Clearly he saw that the intended 70 year period had been extended, because Israel had not repented as required. It seems to me that this was the same reason for the 'delay' in Christ's

second coming; the bridegroom does indeed “delay”, the same word translated “tarried” (Mt. 24:48; 25:5). It didn’t happen in the first century as planned but was delayed, just as the coming of the Messianic Kingdom was delayed in Old Testament times.

The beasts of Daniel 7 are based upon the four metals of the image in Daniel 2, with the feet and ten toes of iron and clay matched by the horns upon the fourth beast. The first beast was given a man’s heart and stood up looking like a man, showing it represented a personal king (Dan. 7:4). Dan. 7:9 speaks of how “the thrones were cast down” and then the last judgment sat. The beasts are therefore kings or “thrones”; their casting down is the same as the smashing of the metals of the image. My point is that the beasts were initially intended to be seen as kings, individuals rather than empires. Dan. 7:17 is clear: “These great beasts, which are four, are four kings which shall arise out of the earth / land”. Likewise “the ten horns... are ten kings” (Dan. 7:24). We are so familiar with the rescheduled, long term application of the prophecies, rolling through the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, that we can overlook the simple fact that the intended fulfilment was in a swift succession of kings after Nebuchadnezzar which would conclude with the return from exile and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom upon the ruins of the Babylonian kings. When it became clear that there would be some delay, Daniel was given the vision of Daniel 8, in which another version of the horns on the fourth beast was given. In this vision, a ram with a great horn spawned four leaders, out of whom came another horn, which persecuted Israel and defiled the sanctuary for 2,300 days, placing the desolating abomination (Dan. 8:13). This time period has now obvious fulfilment. But this very verse is quoted by the Lord Jesus in the Olivet prophecy; and clearly it has the capacity for various potential fulfilments which can be rescheduled if human repentance and response is inadequate. Dan. 8:20-22 says that the two horns on the goat represented the kings of Media and Persia- both of whom Daniel served under (Dan. 5:31; 6:31). After them, four kings could have arisen, followed by a charismatic leader who would conflict with “the prince of princes” [Messiah] and be “broken without hand” (Dan. 8:25) just as the little stone cut out without hands would destroy the image of Daniel 2. Such a situation could have happened in Daniel’s time, or at least in the time of Alexander the Great. But it didn’t. Firstly, in Daniel 2, he saw a succession of four kings. But then, after the second king, he has a vision of another four kings needing to arise; in other words, another element has been added to the sequence, delaying the fulfilment somewhat. Daniel’s response was feeling depressed (Dan. 8:27)- because obviously he wanted the fulfilment as soon as possible.

In Daniel 9, Daniel pleads for the prophecy of restoration to be fulfilled, recognizing that the 70 year period had been extended; he is recorded as repenting on behalf of Judah, and asking that God will not further delay the fulfilment (Dan. 9:19). The answer is the prophecy of the 70 *weeks*. This could mean that 70 *weeks* were going to be added to the 70 *years*. This could have meant a literal 70 weeks from the time of Daniel’s prayer, or the seventy sevens could be a total of 490 day / years. Despite many ingenious attempts, there is no persuasive interpretation of the 70 weeks prophecy. It could be that it is a series of potential possibilities; seven literal weeks from the commandment to restore Jerusalem unto Messiah, and then 62 weeks from Messiah’s coming to His ‘cutting off’. But then the prophecy speaks of how the city and sanctuary would again be destroyed and the destroyer then himself destroyed. This would’ve been most discouraging for Daniel, who was expecting and hoping for the immediate restitution of the temple.

Then in Daniel 10, Daniel was told that the appointed time had been made longer (Dan. 10:1 Heb.). This was in the third year of Cyrus, when according to the earlier prophecies, Daniel was looking for a new king to arise (Daniel 2), or four kings (according to the sequence of Dan. 8). Seeing Daniel had lived through the reigns of at least three kings, he likely expected the reign of these kings to be very brief, so that he might see the coming of the restored Kingdom. But now he is told that the time period has been extended. No wonder Daniel mourned this vision for three weeks (Dan. 10:2). Daniel then symbolically dies and resurrects; the comfort being that he would ultimately be resurrected to the life eternal, but the sadness being that he must die because “the vision [i.e. its fulfilment] is still for many days” (Dan. 10:14). His praying and weeping for those three weeks had not brought about a reverting of the time period back to that originally planned- it was yet or still for many days. In the spirit of Moses, Daniel had tried to change God’s will. All we learn at least from this is that prophetic time periods are open to change. The Olivet prophecy speaks of how “the days”, and the context suggests the ‘days’ of Daniel’s prophecies were in view, will have to be shortened otherwise even the elect will fall away (Mt. 24:22). Dan. 11:2 went on to explain to Daniel that now another series of four kings was envisaged, this time all Persian kings, in contrast to the idea of four *Greek* kings arising in Daniel 8; and this would culminate in two leading kings, of the North and South, who would have a series of conflicts climaxing in the temple being captured again, and conflict with Messiah leading to the resurrection (Dan. 11:40-12:2). This scenario also didn’t happen- and it would explain why no very credible interpretation has been found for Daniel 11. When we read allusions to these prophecies in the Olivet prophecy, and perceive that the Lord had in mind fulfilling them in the first century but later rescheduled that, we must remember that those prophecies had already had various potential fulfilments which had not worked out because of the lack of repentance within Israel. This is the all important sign of fruit on the fig tree, and an encouragement to give highest priority to preaching to Israel.

Daniel’s response is to ask “How long to the end of these things?” (Dan. 12:8 Heb.). He’s given various time periods of days, but told that these do not concern him, for he is to fall asleep in death, and then stand again “at the end of the days” (Dan. 12:13), however many they were, whether shortened or extended, “the end” would come all the same, and he would be resurrected then. And this is the great comfort to all of us as we reflect whether we will live to see the Lord’s coming or not.

Digression 26: With Jesus to Judgment

There has been much confusion over the 'thief-like coming of Christ' mentioned in 1 Thess. 5:2. The context is concerning the state of the ecclesia in the last days, and is shot through with allusions to the parable of the virgins. The sleeping virgins represent the unworthy amongst the believers who will live just prior to the second coming. Paul's allusion to this fills out the details: the coming of Christ to this category of 'believers' will be like a thief in the sense that their privacy and spiritual house will be invaded by the reality of the second coming. This will be due to their attitude of 'peace and safety', which they will actively promulgate - 'Everything's great within the household, we're going from strength to strength spiritually, there's no need to fear failure in any form!' That "they shall *say*, Peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3) suggests that this

is an attitude which they publicly disseminate amongst the brotherhood. Bearing in mind the many prophecies and indications that there will be a massive spiritual collapse within the latter-day ecclesia, it is reasonable to assume that the faithful minority will speak out against this - to be met by a barrage of 'peace and safety' reasoning.

Those who will stand ready for their Lord will be in the light, in the day, self-aware, spiritually sensitive and realistic, and therefore *not* saying "Peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3-8). Christ's coming as a thief to the unworthy is therefore in the sense of His coming being unexpected by them, rather than being as a thief to the world. The frequent application of the 'peace and safety cry' to the world of the last days never ceases to amaze the present writer. Prophecy after prophecy describes a time of global cataclysm around the time of the second coming, even though this may be mixed with a fair degree of material prosperity. In no way will it be a time of "peace and safety" for the world; and their ever-increasing escapism shows that they don't exactly see it like that either. Biblically speaking, their hearts are failing them for fear, apprehensive concerning whatever is going to happen to their planet earth (Lk. 21:26, see modern versions).

GATHERING TO JUDGMENT

The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves.

The connections between the parable of the virgins and 1 Thess. 4 are strengthened by the same Greek word being translated "meet" in Mt. 25:6 concerning the wise virgins going out to "meet" Christ and also in 1 Thess. 4:17: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up... in the clouds to *meet* the Lord in the air". The picture is therefore presented of the righteous obeying the call of their own volition, and then being confirmed in this by being 'snatched away' to meet Christ in the (literal) air. We will then travel with Christ "in the clouds" (literally) to judgment in Jerusalem. In no way, of course, does this suggestion give countenance to the preposterous Pentecostal doctrine of being 'raptured' into heaven itself. Every alternative interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:17 seems to run into trouble with the phrase "meet the Lord *in the air*". 1 Thessalonians is not a letter given to figurative language, but rather to the literal facts of the second coming. Further, the 1 Thess. 4:16-18 passage is described by Paul as him speaking "by the word of the Lord" Jesus (1 Thess. 4:15). If 1 Cor. 7 is any guide to how Paul uses this phrase, he would appear to be saying that in this passage he is merely repeating what the Lord Himself said during His ministry. This deals a death blow to some Pentecostal fantasies about the passage.

It is necessary to side-track in order to show that Paul is speaking of the faithful believers in 1 Thess. 4 and 5 rather than all the responsible:

- He comforts them that the dead believers really will be rewarded with immortality, and that they can take comfort from the fact that they would live for ever (1 Thess. 4:13,14,18). Paul is therefore assuming their acceptability at judgment.

- "Ye are all the children of light" (1 Thess. 5:5) as opposed to the unworthy within the ecclesia, who were in darkness. This suggests that Paul wrote as though his readership were all faithful and assured of eternal life.

Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are therefore those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. " caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. " caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us. This cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) will then go with Jesus to judgment, which must be located on earth for the glimpses of the judgment seat which we are given to be realistically fulfilled. It is reasonable to guess that this assembly of faithful believers will visibly reflect God's glory, giving the impression of a 'shekinah' cloud. This may be due to the physical presence of the Angel with us during our time in this cloud. Such a picture is presented in Dan. 7:9-14; Jesus comes with the faithful, symbolized as clouds, along with the Angels, to the judgment seat. It is at this stage that the responsible from all nations come to the judgment (Mt. 25:32) so that there can be a separation of sheep and goats. The 'coming down' of the righteous responsible to Jerusalem will be at the same time as the judgment of the wicked nations in that same place: "Thither cause thy mighty ones to come down" (Joel 3:11) occurs in the context of Armageddon. "Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau" (Obadiah 21), i.e. Israel's Arab enemies. The sequence of events here suggested chimes in with the thought so often expressed by generations of believers - that our initial reaction to the knowledge that our Lord is back will effectively be our judgment, although this will be formally confirmed at the judgment seat before which all the responsible must appear (2 Cor. 5:10).

The chronology we have suggested can now be summarized:-

- Persecution of believers.
- The Lord is revealed; the resurrection.
- An Angel invites each of the responsible to go and meet Christ.
- The unworthy delay, whilst the worthy go immediately.
- The worthy are snatched away into the air, forming a cloud of glory which is visible to all. They are physically with Jesus.
- Along with Him they come to Jerusalem.
- The unworthy are then gathered there.
- There is a tribunal-style judgment. The sheep and goats are together before the judgment seat. They are then finally separated by Christ's judgment, and receive their rewards.
- The wicked are destroyed along with the nations then surrounding Jerusalem.

The time scale for all this is unimportant - it could well be just a few seconds, if the meaning of time is to be collapsed, although there presumably must be a period of time for the cloud of witnesses to be beheld, and for the unworthy to desperately try to slap themselves into spiritual shape. The tremendous encouragement offered by the scenario here presented should not be missed: we will come with our judge, possibly already reflecting His glory, to the judgment. This in itself should give us a sense of humble certainty as we come before His

tribunal. So much will depend on our reaction to the Angel's coming - our faith in acceptance, our degree of concern for the things of this life - all will be revealed in that instant.