

24:6 *You shall hear*- Gk. 'to come to the ears'. The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours of wars*". Lk. 21:9 adds "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you shall hear* these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

Troubled- The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau- representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

Must come to pass / All must be fulfilled, but the end is not yet- Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system

and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end [s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7).

The end- Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

24:7 Nation against nation- Any first century fulfilment is unlikely because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham. The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who

are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Moslem nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment (:14); the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

Kingdom against kingdom- It seems likely that 'Babylon' of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the Arab world. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land promised to Abraham- the "kings of the earth / land"- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, after the example of Saddam Hussein, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince

of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the “king of fierce countenance” stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

Famines- There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation. Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not to. And thus the second coming was delayed. “In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and Claudius” (2). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

Earthquakes- Just as there was at the crucifixion (27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

Various places- The word "various" (AV "divers") is added by the translators to try to make

sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in :15 about "the holy *place*". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her Arab neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

24:8 *Birth pangs*- The term is used of the Lord's suffering, which came to term in His resurrection (Acts 2:24)- another hint that the tribulation is intended to bring those who endure it to an identity with the Lord's sufferings, and thus to share in His resurrection. There is therefore a positive intention in the sufferings. They are not merely an angry Deity releasing pent up anger upon the world. The term is also used in 1 Thess. 5:3, in a section full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy: "When they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as *travail* [s.w. "sorrows"] upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape". This suggests that the various trials and tribulations just listed by the Lord are going to come suddenly- they don't describe decades of such things leading up to His return. Rather do they therefore describe a sudden situation which comes at a time of "peace and safety". They may therefore describe the events of days rather than years. The Lord within the Olivet prophecy had spoken of the possibility of "escape" by fleeing, but "they shall *not* escape"- because they will be disobedient to His teaching. The intention of the birth pangs is to forge an identity between the sufferers and the crucified Christ, coming to birth in a resurrection like His. But for these people, the birth pangs are tragic, resulting in death rather than resurrection to life. See on :9 *To be afflicted*.

The Lord is surely alluding to the Rabbinic idea of "the birth-pangs of the Messiah" which they used in description of the traumatic situation in Israel before Messiah's appearance. The Jewish public had initially expected Jesus to be Messiah, and felt that their time was indeed the birth-pangs of Messiah. But the Lord is saying that that time is yet to come. Seeing He did not come in

AD70, we are again left to understand this as a reference to a situation *in Israel* which brings about the open manifestation of Messiah.

We frequently struggle to understand which verses apply to AD70 and which to the last days. I have suggested that forcing such a distinction is unwise because the entire prophecy was a conditional prophecy which began to have fulfilment in AD70 but was rescheduled in its final fulfilment. However it could be argued that Mt. 24:8-22 can be read as a parenthesis specifically concerning the events of AD70: the first seven verses and Mt. 24:23 ff. refer to events of both the last days and AD70.

24:9 *Deliver you up*- Just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles [s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Mark adds "They shall deliver you up to councils and in the synagogues you shall be beaten". Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

To be afflicted- S.w. "great *tribulation*" (:21,29). The Lord was addressing the disciples, and yet their sufferings were not completely in line with the picture presented here, whereby their suffering was at the same time as Jerusalem was surrounded by armies. Clearly the intended program was delayed. John's equivalent of the Olivet prophecy is the upper room discourse, and the same idea as in :8 of a woman in the sorrows of labour is to be found there, and also this same word for 'afflicted' is found, translated "anguish" and "tribulation": "A woman when she is in labour has... *anguish*... in the world you shall have *tribulation*" (Jn. 16:21,33). The Lord seems to speak as if these experiences will be those of all His true followers, but just as His anguish and sorrow came to term in His triumphant resurrection, so for all who are in Him. John uses the language of the Olivet prophecy but seems to apply it in more general terms to the suffering of the believer in all ages. Surely this was consciously done as a response to the fact that the Olivet prophecy had been rescheduled in fulfilment. Again we find the idea of 'affliction' associated with the Lord's sufferings. Joseph, His clearest prototype, was 'afflicted' (Acts 7:10 s.w.), just as his brothers were 'afflicted' to lead them to repentance and acceptance of how badly they had treated Joseph / Jesus (Acts 7:11 s.w.). Stephen's use of the same word for the sufferings of both

Joseph and his brothers was surely to teach that Israel's affliction was in order to teach them what they had done to Joseph, and to thereby identify with Him and repent. And this is exactly the purpose of Israel's latter day afflictions as outlined in the Olivet prophecy, and likewise the reason for the new Israel experiencing them- to help us identify with our crucified Lord. The same word is used in Rom. 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?". Here Paul lists the kinds of tribulation outlined in the Olivet prophecy and assures his first century readers that these will never separate them from God's love- he clearly expected the prophecy to have a first century fulfilment. Likewise the Lord foresaw the possibility of the "great tribulation" coming upon the first century church (Rev. 2:22), and uses the same term "great tribulation" to describe the experiences of those Jewish Christians who would finally be saved (Rev. 7:14).

Shall kill you- "Some of you shall they cause to be put to death... but there shall not an hair of your head perish" (Lk. 21:16) can only be reconciled by appreciating how miraculously the first century disciples were preserved in order to inspire and co-ordinate the rest of the body. Perhaps a similar group of elders ("the two witnesses"?) will be preserved in the last days too. *Apokteino*, 'to kill', is used many times in the Gospels, nearly always with reference to the killing of the Lord Jesus. Again there is the hint that the sufferings of the tribulation period are intended to create identity with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. In John, the upper room discourse replaces the Olivet prophecy. The word is used there for how the believers would be put out of the synagogues [opposition from synagogues is specifically mentioned in the Olivet prophecy] and then "whoever kills you will think that he does God service" (Jn. 16:2). Only religious hatred could explain the mad hatred unto death of which we are reading here- persecution on the basis of thinking that they are doing God service. We can expect, therefore, religiously motivated persecution in the last days. With the collapse of secular Christianity and strong religious commitment in much of the modern world, the only religion likely to fulfil this picture is Islam- and there is no lack of evidence that a worldwide persecution of Jews and those who hold a Jewish rooted faith is absolutely on their agenda, and is already bursting upon us.

Hated of all nations- But the Gospel will then be preached to "all nations" (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen.

For My Name's sake- The phrase rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John's parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be "hated... for My Name's sake" (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world's attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and

all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century.

You shall be beaten in the synagogues (Mk. 13:9). The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2), as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism.

Mark and Luke add "It shall turn to you for a testimony". Maybe the idea is that public trial for our faith will be a good public witness. Or it could be that the testimony in our favour is before the Heavenly throne room, where our human situations are as it were played out before the Lord. When the Lord said that His people would preach before rulers 'for a witness / testimony against them' (Mk. 13:9), we are left wondering when and how exactly this will be. It's hard to come to any other conclusion than that this refers to how our words of preaching will be quoted back to the hearers at the judgment. It's an incidental proof that it is hearing the word of the Gospel that makes a person responsible to the last judgment. But in our context, my point is that our words of preaching in this life will be quoted back to those who heard them, at the day of judgment. The simple point is, our words aren't forgotten. They will be quoted back, in some form, at the day of judgment. And yet it appears we can speak and think how we like in this life. Indeed we can; but all these things will ultimately surface again in the last day.

Lk. 21:13 speaks of how when a believer is persecuted, "it shall turn to you for a testimony". Perhaps the Angels give a positive testimony of the faithful believer in the court of Heaven. And at the final judgment, these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness. Or could it mean that the way we respond to our trials during the tribulation will determine our verdict at the judgment? It will be a testimony in our favour at the day of judgment. In view of this, "Settle it *therefore* in your hearts" to make this witness in God's strength (Lk. 21:14). "In the endurance of you (in the tribulation), ye will gain the souls of you" (Lk. 21:19 Marshall's Interlinear). The run up to the tribulation will provoke a "praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36). Peter describes the tribulation of the believers in the run up to AD70 (and therefore the last days too) as judgment taking place on the house of God, in which even the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:17,18). This suggests that the last generation of believers will only be saved due to their response to the tribulation which comes upon them; but even then, only by the skin of their teeth.

Lot in Sodom and the parable of the virgins, among others, are hints that the last generation of believers will be in a weak state.

Lk. 21:15 adds at this point: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay". This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say". This persecution led to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev. 11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the 3.5 year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

24:10 *Many be offended*- To stumble, in its Biblical sense, implies those in view were once walking in the Faith. This is clearly how the Lord uses it in the parable of the sower (13:21 s.w.). The majority [Gk.] will stumble out of the way in this final tribulation. Such a test of faith is logically required for that generation- because those who are alive at the time of the Lord's coming will be the only generation who never actually die. They will therefore require this particularly acute test of faith; and the majority will fail it, and stumble from the path. The language of betrayal which is then used would suggest that those who stumble will be like Judas who betrayed the Lord- and he was amongst the believers. It's a sorry picture, but we must let the Lord's words have their true weight and fairly obvious meaning. The cosy church environments of today will simply not be that way during the very last days before the Lord's return. The upper room discourse again has a connection with the Olivet prophecy at this point, because the Lord says that He was warning His followers ahead of time that they would be persecuted and cast out of the synagogues, and He was warning them ahead of time exactly so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The Olivet prophecy, if taken seriously, is therefore

not mere prediction of future events, but rather specifically intended to stop the faithful stumbling as they behold every detail suddenly coming true in the very last days.

Betray one another- Again, the final sufferings of the Lord Jesus will be experienced within natural and spiritual Israel. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "The son dishonours the father... a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ.

Hate one another- The same word just used for how the believers would be "hated of all nations" (:9). The spirit and religious position of the world will be adopted by some amongst the believers, and they will turn against their brethren as a result of this. This is in line with the language of betrayal just used, replete as it is with allusion to Judas, one of the twelve. Likewise "false prophets" (:11) suggest those located within the community of faith who are pushing a totally different agenda.

24:11 *False prophets-* A comparison of Mt. 24:11 and 24 suggests that there will be two particular periods of false prophet activity- at the outbreak of the persecution, and then immediately prior to the Lord's return. This latter group reason that Christ's second coming has already occurred in some non-literal form. Thus :27 speaks as if the clear return of Christ in the clouds will prove them wrong. These men would equate with Peter's description of some within the ecclesia of the last days saying "Where is the promise of His coming?". The language of false prophets suggests they arise from within the community of believers (see on :10). The "many" whom they deceive are presumably the same "many" who shall stumble from their faith (:10). The 'false prophets' of our age are hardly very credible. But if these false prophets have apparent access to Holy Spirit gifts and claim to do miracles, as passages in Revelation suggest, then they may well have more credibility. This particular sign was fulfilled in the first century, for "many false prophets [s.w.] are gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1).

Shall rise- The reference is to the LXX of Jer. 29:15, where we read of false prophets arising amongst Israel whilst they were in Babylon. The message of those false prophets was that Judah

would be saved from Babylon without repentance, and that in practice, spiritual separation was not required from Babylon. And this will be the precise context for the false prophets in latter day Israel.

Shall deceive many- False prophets of both Old and New Testaments were associated with immorality or at least, an easy, fleshly ‘spirituality’. With harsh persecution and death sentences for true faith in Christ, the environment will be ripe for such false teachers; and false prophets are believed because people want to believe their message. Four times the Lord repeats this warning against being deceived, using the same word (:4,5,11,24). The words for deception and ‘false prophet’ recur in Revelation, again in a latter day context (Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20). The source of the deceit is ‘Babylon’, the latter day confederacy of anti-Israel and anti-Christian powers around Israel.

24:12 *Iniquity shall abound*- The LXX of Dan. 12:10 "The wicked shall do wickedly". This is last days language, describing the situation just before Daniel is resurrected. It cannot therefore have had any major fulfilment in the period before AD70. Thus "Because iniquity shall abound (within the ecclesia?), the love of many ("the many", R.V.- the majority) shall wax cold" (Mt.24:12). Bad spiritual standards will spread like cancer in the last days. Thus the ecclesial leaders of the last days must beware of the temptation to be over harsh on the faithful remnant, whilst eating and drinking with "the drunken", i.e. those elements in the ecclesia who will be unprepared for the Lord's coming. 2 Thess. 2:7,8 use the same word to describe how the “mystery [the Greek is a distinctly religious word] of *iniquity*” was already gathering momentum in the first century, leading to “the wicked one”, the one of iniquity / lawlessness [s.w.] being revealed; again, we sense the possibility of a first century fulfilment which never came to its ultimate term. “Abound” translates *plethuno*, the noun of which is *plethos*, frequently translated “multitude”. The idea is that because of the masses being without law, iniquitous, the love of the majority *amongst the believers* will become cold. They will be influenced by the lawlessness of the majority around them; the church will become as the world. And there is no lack of evidence that this is already happening.

The love- The love- *agape* – of the majority will be lost in the latter day community of believers, whilst peoples from all nations hear and accept the Gospel. Could this mean that the established groups of believers lose their *agape* whilst the real fire of the Truth spreads to the new converts made during the great tribulation, as spoken of in Rev. 7? The parables of Mt. 25 seem to refer specifically to the state of the latter day believers, and they speak of a beating of the fellow-servants.

Many- The presence of the article, *'the many'*, means that this refers to 'the majority'.

Become cold- A related word is used in Rev. 3:15,16 in speaking of how the love of the early believers had decreased from hot to lukewarm, although not completely cold. Again we get the sense that this part of the Olivet prophecy was on its way to fulfilment- but had not come to full term.

24:13 *Endure to the end-* The idea of enduring to the end and being saved is the spirit of the Lord's struggle on the cross (Heb. 12:2,3 s.w.). Again we see that the sufferings of the last days enable the faithful to fellowship the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. *Hupomeno* ["endure"] is a form of *meno*, 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. 'Enduring to the end' is paralleled with *agape* love not becoming cold; the real endurance is in continuing in the thankless life of love, in the midst of a majority of believers who have lost their way. This is what is so difficult.

The end- The end of the tribulation period is described with the same term as is used about the Lord's death on the cross being "the end" (26:58; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:1). Again we see that the experiences of the tribulation are intended to forge identity with the final sufferings of the Lord. 1 Thess. 2:16 speaks of Divine wrath coming upon Israel "to the end" (s.w.; AV "to the uttermost"), as if "the end" could have come in the first century. Peter was very clear: "The end [s.w.] is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Constantly we see evidence for what could have happened- and yet did not. And yet it shall happen, ultimately. And the only conclusion can really be that the final "end" was deferred, the Divine program rescheduled.

Shall be saved- In the first instance, "the end" was the end of the tribulation period, for he that endures to the end *shall be saved*, but :22 explains that unless the days [the 1260 days of the time periods?] are shortened, then even the elect will not be "saved" (s.w.).

24:14 *This Gospel-* We wonder what is the intention of the emphasis upon "this" Gospel being preached. We are assisted in understanding by the way Matthew uses the same terms in 26:13:

“Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman has done, be told for a memorial to her”. The language is so similar that there is surely a connection. The Gospel records are transcripts of how those like Matthew originally preached the Gospel. Over time, the account they gave became written down, under inspiration. The Gospel message is, therefore, in the Gospel records. ‘This Gospel’ would therefore be a reference to Matthew’s Gospel record, which it was the intention of Matthew and those who had been converted by it to spread worldwide. This would explain why each of the Gospel records includes the incident of the woman anointing the Lord; wherever the Gospel was preached worldwide, that testimony to her would be included. Matthew was therefore proactively attempting to fulfil the Lord’s comment that the Gospel must be preached in all the world. He saw prophecy not so much as prediction but command. It could also be that the “this” connects with the end of :13, “shall be saved”. Salvation is the good news of the Kingdom. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:14). “My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt. 19:12,29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29).

Shall be preached- This could be read as a commandment, not a mere prediction. In this case, the idea is that *when* the Gospel is preached to all the world, then “the end comes”. The marvel is that this amazing preaching will be undertaken by a minority within the believing community, since, according to the preceding verses, the majority will have fallen away. And even amongst those who remain faithful, some will be in prison, others killed. It could be argued that this Gospel preaching occurs specifically during the tribulation period. If we were to take the Gospel to the whole world now, then perhaps this would not be necessary. But in the first century, it was persecution which was necessary to get the disciples to obey their Lord’s command to spread the Gospel outwards from Jerusalem to the world. And it was persecution which made the fleeing Jewish Christians rub shoulders with Gentiles, and thus share the Gospel with them.

In all the world- The first century fulfilment of these words mentioned in Rom. 10:18 and Col. 1:6,23,26 was because there was the potential that the Lord could have come in AD70. But the Greek word literally means ‘the inhabited’, and more naturally refers to the whole planet. He envisaged the possibility that the disciples would not have gone preaching over the cities of Israel before the end came (10:23). But He did come in AD70, and so the Lord's words here about a genuine worldwide witness must come true before He returns. Note the Gospel is to be preached “in”, *en*, all the world, and not ‘to’ the whole world. This may envisage there being believers in all the world who preach where they are. This would nowhere near have been fulfilled in the first century. Also, Col. 1:6 speaks of the Gospel having gone to the *kosmos*, whereas Mt. 24:14 requires the Gospel to be preached in the *oikoumene*. *Kosmos* is frequently used in the NT with reference to the *Jewish* world. *Oikoumene* has a more global and universal context and sense. Mk. 13:10 says that the Gospel must be published “among all nations” (Gk. *ethnos*), and this hardly occurred by AD70. Some parts of the Olivet prophecy had a limited application in the first century (e.g. Mt. 24:14 = 10:18), but this doesn't mean that this is the *only*

fulfilment of it. It is a feature of prophecy that it often has a short term fulfilment in order to validate the prophet in the eyes of his own generation. It would be strange indeed if the Olivet prophecy had *only* a short term fulfilment.

The great commission bids us go into all the world with Gospel; note the evident connection with Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come". This definitely suggests that the great commission will be mightily obeyed in the last days. There are many other Biblical implications that there will be an unprecedented spread of the Gospel to the whole planet in the last days. Thus Dan. 12:4 speaks of a time in the very last days when "many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge shall be increased [the context is of Daniel wanting to understand about the second coming of Jesus]... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand". This increase of knowledge of the Gospel is to be spread world-wide by many running to and fro in the last days. The great commission will be fulfilled then as never before. Dan. 11:32,33 speaks of how in the time of the end "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many". Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The crucial question, of course, is whether the Gospel has truly gone into all the world. One perspective to bear in mind is that in the preaching of Paul, ecclesias which he founded are taken as representing a whole area- e.g. Philippi is called "Macedonia" (Phil. 4:15); Thessalonica is "Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:7); Corinth is Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1); Ephesus for Asia (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:8). In this sense Paul felt that he had fully preached the Gospel in a circle, moving from Jerusalem through Asia to Rome, and projecting onwards to Spain. Perhaps the Gospel goes into all the world in the sense that believers, however small in number, are to be found world-wide. And that seems to be where we're now up to in the 21st century.

Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of

variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment.

For a witness- The Gospel was to be preached for a witness to all nations (Mt. 24:14); and yet "ye are witnesses... you will be witnesses" (Lk. 24:27; Acts 1:8). The preacher of the Gospel is the Gospel; the man is the message, just as the very same word / message was made flesh in the Lord. Israel of old were taught this. They were to keep and do the commandments of God, and *this* would be the witness of their wisdom and understanding to the nations around them- who would thereby be brought to Israel's God (Dt. 4:6-8). The imparting of wisdom and understanding therefore didn't come so much through specific doctrinal exposition, as through living out those principles in daily life. But *marturion*, "witness", can simply be a legal term referring to testimony or witness in a prosecution. Perhaps the sense is that judgment will come upon all the world once the Gospel has been witnessed to them; it is their receipt of that information which gives them the knowledge which makes them responsible to Divine judgment. For once this witness has been made, then the end comes.

Unto all nations- If every *ethnos* must at least have the Gospel of the Kingdom witnessed to them, it's impossible to understand this as having had final fulfilment in AD70. The fact there will be believers from every *ethnos* saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) means that this witness will succeed- against all odds, seeing that at the time, there will be mass persecution and hatred against believers. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:39,14). "My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt. 19:12,29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29). Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the

day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The word used in Mt. 24:14 for “witness to all nations” occurs in Mt. 10:18 concerning our being brought before judges etc. as a witness. Our behaviour during the final tribulation is the witness- perhaps the implication could be that there will be quiet believers world-wide before the final tribulation begins, and their witness under persecution will be the public proclamation of the Gospel world-wide of which the Lord speaks here? In the spread of the true Gospel recently we perhaps see the way for this being prepared. The word also occurs in the parallel Lk. 21:13- our behaviour during the final tribulation will be the witness we make. The reluctance of the early church to throw their full weight behind obeying the command to " go into all the world and preach the Gospel" was only ended by the cosy ecclesias of Judea being persecuted, resulting in their increased appreciation of their hope, and preaching it to those previously neglected nations into which they were driven (Acts 11:19-22). Are the Christian heartlands in for something similar? That the mission fields are so white to the harvest but so chronically short of labourers indicates how nicely such a scenario would work to God's glory.

Then shall the end come- The Lord gave some signs which would be required but would not be the “end” (:6 “the end is not yet”). It would seem that the urgent spreading of the Gospel as a witness worldwide, perhaps in the context of well publicized legal cases against believers, will be the very final sign which heralds “the end”. This witness to the Gospel worldwide would therefore be during the tribulation itself, or at least at some point between verses 6 and 14. The witness may therefore take a matter of days, rather than the gradual spread of the Gospel worldwide over a matter of decades. With the nature of the media and instant communication, such global penetration and persuasion of a minority could indeed happen in a matter of days. The high profile, globally covered testimony under tribulation or torture of even one believer could trigger the conversion of individuals literally worldwide. Perhaps the prophecy of the two witnesses in the last days in Rev. 11 provides more details, or will then be understood as being fulfilled. Even if we cannot quite imagine now how it will be fulfilled, when the time comes for it to be, it will be compellingly clear.

24:15 *When you therefore shall see-* Luke adds “Jerusalem compassed by armies”. Jerusalem was truly “compassed with armies” in Hezekiah’s time, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days. His subsequent warning to those in the country areas not running into Jerusalem for refuge is also an allusion to the situation in Hezekiah’s time- for this was exactly what happened then (Lk. 21:20,21 RV). The “therefore”, *oun*, need not necessarily reference the previous clause. It may be setting up a condition upon which something must be done- in this case, fleeing (:16).

Abomination- The word is mainly used elsewhere about the abominations of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:4,5). I would suggest that once the rescheduling of Christ's return was decided by God, the Gospel of John was issued, with its more spiritual interpretation of the Olivet prophecy in terms of the Comforter, and the teaching that the principles of the tribulation are to be lived out throughout the lives of believers. And John was likewise inspired with the prophecy of Revelation, which is clearly based upon the Olivet prophecy and provides further details as to how the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the last days, with the events of AD70 being a partial fulfilment in order to give the prophecy credibility with the generation that first received it. This would be according to the Mosaic principle that a prophet could be judged as true if his words came true- requiring a primary fulfilment of all long term prophecies.

The abomination of desolation- Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

Desolation- The word is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has

similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic 'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt.23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance (see the Digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel').

Stand in the holy place- Mk. "where it ought not". "Holy place" is without the article, and could refer to any holy place. The contrast is with the Lamb who will descend to the temple mount and "stand" there [s.w. Rev. 14:1]. This will be the final showdown between the real Christ and the fake one, as likewise foreseen in the prophecy of the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2, where again the place of showdown is the temple. For this to be a sign to the believers to flee to the mountains, any application to the triumphant Roman legions placing their standards in the temple at the *end* of the Jewish war is precluded. And historically, it is doubtful whether that happened, as the temple was burnt with fire and the legions were told *not* to do this.

Whoever reads- The vast majority of first century believers were likely illiterate. So this may be an appeal to teachers to correctly understand and teach.

Let him understand- The Lord speaks in a latter day context about "let him that readeth understand" Daniel's prophecies (Mk. 13:14)- referring to the special gift of understanding them which Daniel himself was told would come in the very end time. But note the parallels in the Lord's teaching here: "Let him... understand... let him... not go down... let him... not return... let them... flee". The understanding He refers to is not merely academic. It is the understanding that will lead to concrete action.

The Lord's Olivet prophecy as recorded by Mark has so many allusions to the Maccabean revolt under Mattathias ("the abomination", flight to the hills, "let the reader understand" and many other phrases are all quotations from 1 Macc. 1-3). But in this context the Lord warns of false Messiahs- as if He considered the Maccabean heroes to be just that. And interestingly it is Mark more than any other Gospel writer who stresses the Messiahship of Jesus throughout the crucifixion record. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews a contradiction in terms. The idea of Jewish revolutionaries marching triumphantly to Jerusalem to liberate it was common in Jewish thought at the time- but Luke emphasizes that Christ's last journey to Jerusalem and triumphant entry to it was in fact in order to die the death of the cross there. The battle had been redefined by the Lord Jesus- not against Rome, but against internal sin and Jewish religious hypocrisy. Victory was by self-crucifixion, not military might. This was just too much for Jewish nationalism, just as legalists today end up buying for the blood of those who preach grace and not works.

There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel 12:4, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was " yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run" - using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him " understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then... do something about it'. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them.

“Let him that reads understand” is inviting us to be like Daniel in Dan. 9:22-25, who also wanted to understand the meaning of the “abomination” prophecy. But he was told that the meaning of that vision about the abomination that desolates would only be revealed in the very last days, i.e. at the time of its fulfilment (Dan. 8:17,26; 12:9). The implication of all this is that there will be believing Jews living in the Jerusalem area at the time of the setting up of the abomination; and

they will have special understanding of this prophecy which will lead them to flee. The importance of this for our present study is that this indicates that there will be believers in Israel just before the Lord returns. They will have “understanding” and will be motivated by this to respond. “*Let him... understand*” is paralleled with “*let him that is on the housetop [flee immediately]... let him that is in the field not return*”. Understanding leads to action- both then and now.

In the spirit of Daniel, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run"- using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then...do something about it'. "Let him that readeth understand" is yet another Olivet allusion back to Daniel (12:10); yet generations of believers have read those very words and *not* understood. Presumably the latter day remnant *will* clearly understand Daniel's enigmatic words about the abomination. Whilst we should live *as if* we expect the Lord's imminent return, it has to be said that we don't seem to have yet reached this level of understanding. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them. The expansion of understanding may be not only of prophecies like Habakkuk, Daniel and Revelation. Because Revelation especially is so full of reference to other passages throughout the Scriptures, our comprehension of the whole Bible will go into another paradigm. It may be that in the last days, *all* the words of God will in some sense be fulfilled (Rev. 17:17)- we will realize that the whole Bible is especially speaking to us, the last generation. Many of the parables are specifically aimed at the last generation of believers- they have a very secondary application to believers of other ages. They are specifically about the attitudes of those who will be alive when the Lord comes in glory; e.g. the wise and foolish virgins, or the men given talents, or the servants left watching the household etc. The Lord's letters in Revelation speak of him being about to come, as do many other NT passages. They were written specifically for the last generation of believers! Their full meaning and relevance will therefore only be perceived by that generation. Take Rev. 3:20 as an example: "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear

my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me". Whatever else this may be taken to mean, according to its connections with other passages, this is clearly relevant to the Lord's second coming; the believer who responds to the Lord's voice in the last days will be rewarded with the Lord's coming. Verses like this and the parables mentioned above are pre-eminently relevant to the last generation. No wonder there will be a growth in understanding in the last days!

24:16 *Flee*- The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee' may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

Into the mountains- Better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom for the mountains, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on

by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" may mean that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has yet to be totally fulfilled (the AD70 application of these words was at best limited). Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry. This is certainly encouragement enough to make witness to and within Israel a priority.

24:17 *On the housetop*- The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here and in :18 is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years, leading slowly towards the Lord's coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field (:18) needing to leave immediately naturally connects with the words of :40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

To take anything out of his house- The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains" (:16). This is a type of the response of the believers to the call to judgment at the

Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. But the Greek could equally mean 'to take anyone [person] out of his house / family'. This again is a high demand- the demand of the Sermon on the Mount, to put family in second place behind personal loyalty to the Lord Jesus. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy. They will know that in any case, they are powerless to drag their unbelieving family members with them.

24:18 *To take his clothes*- The immediacy of response is clear. Even grabbing an outer garment, equivalent of a jacket, would lead to unworthiness and destruction. The call to leave must be responded to immediately, with the faith that what clothing we have on is utterly irrelevant. This only really makes sense if the call or sign to escape is the call to judgment- and this verse connects with the words of :40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". See on :17.

24:19 *Woe unto them that are with child*- This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor.7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 "blessed are [those] who never gave suck" = Mt. 24:19 "Woe to them... who give suck", s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of "woe" in Matthew, the objects of the "woe" are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those "with child" are therefore not amongst those who obediently 'flee'. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the "wrath upon this people". In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

24:20 *Pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath*- The "flight" refers to the opportunity given to the civilians of Jerusalem to flee. These opportunities were in October

AD67 and in Spring AD70. "The Sabbath" refers more likely to the Sabbath Year rather than to the weekly sabbath. There would've been little food in the Sabbath year because the land was not to be planted that year. The sabbath year at the time was AD68/69 (the last Sabbath year ever observed in the land). So perhaps we can reason from these facts that the Lord's words were heeded, the faithful did pray as He recommended- and so they did not flee in Winter (but rather in Autumn 67 and Spring 70), nor in the Sabbath year.

The Lord's request for prayer indicates that the exact timing of events in the tribulation will be changeable in accordance with the fervency of our latter day prayers. Changeable time periods has been a feature of God's prophetic dealings with Israel (see the Digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel'); and :22 is explicit that the [intended number of] days will be shortened. An AD70 application for this is hard to find; it may be that the exact timing of the Roman offer of amnesty was dependent on the intensity of prayer by the besieged Jerusalem ecclesia. That ecclesia, rent as they were by schism, false doctrine and materialism (if we accept the evidence that Hebrews was addressed to them) was a type of the faithful remnant of the last days. They were finally sorted out by the events of AD67 - 70, cp. the latter day tribulation.

Lk. 21:24 adds: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot*". This part of Luke 21 is clearly alluding to Zechariah 14, a prophecy about the final desolation of Jerusalem:

Luke 21	Zechariah 14
20. Jerusalem surrounded by armies	2. All nations against Jerusalem to battle
20. The desolation of Jerusalem is near	2. The city shall be taken
21. Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains	5. You shall flee to the ... mountains
22. Great distress in the land	2. Houses ransacked, women raped.
24. Led away captive into all nations	2. Half the city shall go into captivity
24. Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles.	12:3 LXX Jerusalem a stone trodden down by the Gentiles.

The context of Zechariah 14 is clearly concerning the last days and the literal appearance of Messiah in Israel. The way the Olivet Prophecy alludes to it, indeed is based upon it, shows that it too requires reference to the last days. Any limited fulfillment in AD70 was only a partial foretaste of the final outworking of the prophecy. I have explained in the digression about 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel' that Dan. 8:13 itself was a prophecy which had already had various possible fulfillments but had already had its fulfillment rescheduled a few times. It is therefore unsurprising if its intended, or possible, fulfillment in AD70 was again rescheduled.

24:21 *For then*- Mk., "in those days". Mk. 13:19 speaks of how "in those days" those in Judaea should flee to the mountains; "for *in those days* shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation... neither shall be (referring to Dan. 12:1 concerning our last days)... except that the Lord had shortened *those days*... *in those days*, after that tribulation... *then* shall they see the son of man coming". Surely "in those days" shouts for a continuous application to the same "days" - the days of the second coming, the days during which the obedient 'flee' (and I have suggested that may be in response to the Angelic invitation to go meet the returning Lord Jesus). At best, "those days" can have a primary reference to the events of AD70, but the *main* fulfillment of the whole prophecy must be in the last days. This point seems impossible to answer by those who disallow any reference to the second coming.

Great tribulation- The LXX uses this same word for "tribulation" in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:

"The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)

"The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)

"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.

"Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)"- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.

"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)

The “day of trouble” in Hezekiah’s time, when Jerusalem again was surrounded by armies (Is. 37:3), and saved by a visible ‘coming’ of the Lord against the Assyrian confederacy.

“There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days. This verse would appear to be in the Lord’s mind at this time. The same Hebrew phrase for “day of trouble” is repeatedly used about the traumas of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian invaders (Is. 33:2; 37:3; 65:16; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 14:8; 15:11; 16:19; 30:7; Obadiah 12,14; Zeph. 1:15). These historical situations were clearly intended to be understood as precursors of the final tribulation of Jerusalem, again at the hands of the neighbouring nations. The time of “trouble” [*tsarah*] in Dan. 12:1 is literally ‘the time of the enemy / adversary’, and the same word is used of the time (Esther 4:14) of the enemy and adversary [*tsar*] in Esther 7:4,6, when again the Jews were threatened with destruction at the hand of the Agagite / Gog of Haman.

Since the beginning of the world- Mk. 13:19 “From the beginning of creation”. But the allusion is to Dan. 12:1, “Since there was a nation”, and the context suggests the idea is ‘Since *Israel* were ever a nation’. The “world” in view may therefore be the Jewish world, and “creation” is being used as Judaism sometimes used the term, to refer to the creation of the nation at Sinai. The use of the phrase “the beginning of creation” rather than just “creation” would suggest that the creation of the world in view was an ongoing process, which is a beautiful insight into the nature of God’s natural and spiritual work with the world of believers, with Israel, and even with the natural creation.

Nor ever will- surely only applicable to the last days, the time of Jacob’s trouble predicted in Jeremiah. Clearly the main fulfillment cannot be limited to AD70. The threat to “all flesh” in :22 likewise cannot be seriously applied to the situation of AD70. The language of Lk. 21:28 is also impossible to apply to AD70: “But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”. The allusion is obviously to Dan. 12:1: “A time of trouble such as never was”. I have shown in the digression ‘Conditional Prophecy in Daniel’ that this particular prophecy had various possible fulfillments; and in harmony with that history, it could have been fulfilled in AD70, that was the intention, but the preconditions were not all fulfilled, and therefore its ultimate fulfillment was delayed until the final ‘last days’. The “time of trouble” in Dan. 12:1 is after Michael ‘stands up’, after the visible manifestation either of the Lord Jesus personally, or the Angel Michael who represented Him in the court of Heaven. The “time of trouble” is therefore in the very last days, perhaps literally days, the “then” of this verse 21 in Matthew 24, the time when the faithful have already dropped

their jackets and left their homes to go to meet the Lord. It is inappropriate, therefore, to describe our present times *before* that period as “the time of trouble such that never was”. And it may be that Dan. 12:1 specifically refers to this unprecedented time of trouble as being for *Israel*-trouble such as never was since they were a nation.

24:22 Days... shortened- The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem for a year before it fell, but the Roman siege lasted about five months- according to Josephus, from April 14 to September 8. God can shorten intended time periods at will, for time is seen by Him in a different dimension and context to our experience of it. According to 2 Sam. 24:15,16 LXX, it would seem that the three days of intended plague became one day, because of David's prayer and repentance, and God's pity; "the Lord repented Him of the evil". It seems this shortening happened- for 1 Cor. 7:29 RV says that “the time is shortened”, in clear allusion to the Lord’s words here. Perhaps this is why it was intended that there be 40 years from AD33 [the crucifixion] to the destruction of the temple; but this period was “shortened” by at least 3 years “for the elect’s sake”. And the situation in the 1st century is evidently typical of ours today in these last days. They were to pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath or in the Winter, i.e. that the abomination that made desolate would not be set up at those times. Clearly prayer affected the exact chronology of events and thereby the fulfilment of prophecy.

Had been shortened- The Greek tense specifically means that the days had already been shortened. And yet the verse concludes with the future tense: “The days will be shortened”. The Lord Jesus was confident that although the shortening was yet future, it had in essence been achieved. This may well have been by the Lord’s intercession. In this case, Mk. 13:20 would be a comment inserted by the evangelist, referring to the Lord Jesus: “The Lord had shortened the days... He has shortened the days”. See on *The elect* . According to the parable of Lk. 13:8, the Lord Jesus had persuaded the Father to extend an intended time period for Israel’s repentance, and had gained at least another year or half year of patient waiting for spiritual fruit on Israel. It’s quite possible, therefore, that the intended “days” of suffering had already been reduced by the Lord’s intercession, because He foresaw the weakness of the latter day “elect”; and also, simply was heartbroken at the prospect of all the suffering He was predicting. 2 Pet. 3:12 says we can hasten the coming of the day of the Lord- perhaps the Lord was speaking in faith that elect would indeed hasten it and thereby shorten the days. Hence He speaks in both past and future tenses concerning the shortening of the days. And yet on the other hand, it is the delay of judgment which allows opportunity for repentance and salvation (2 Pet. 3:15). Thus in the final algorithm controlling the coming of Christ, there are delay factors and hastening factors. The vision will in one sense “not delay / tarry” (Hab. 2:3 RV). And yet the same verse speaks of how it does “tarry”. Perhaps in a human sense it delays, but not from God’s perspective. “It hasteth toward the end” (Hab. 2:3 RV) could imply that things are speeded up in their fulfilment in the very end

time; for the elects sake the days until the second coming are shortened (Mk. 13:20). And yet things are also delayed- the bridegroom tarries / delays, to the point that many realize that the Lord has delayed His coming, and begin to act inappropriately. One reconciliation of these paradoxes could be that some prophecies are speeded up in their fulfilment because of the elect would otherwise lose their faith; and yet other prophecies seem to be delayed in fulfilment because of the unspirituality of others. The possibility of changing the fulfilment of prophetic time periods is to be found in Hab. 3:2: "In the midst of the years revive..."- i.e. please, God, do it immediately rather than waiting until the end of days. The difference in tenses between "has shortened" and "will shorten" may also simply reflect how God conceives of time in a radically different way to how we do. The shortening of time in a sense hasn't take place, but in another sense it has. There can therefore be no trite explanation of how God can hasten the second coming in accordance with our prayers, and yet also have a set time to favour Zion.

The days- With so many allusions to Daniel's prophecies, perhaps the days in view are those of Daniel's various prophecies. Perhaps this is the explanation of the 1260, 1290 and 1335 days in Daniel 12; and the otherwise difficult reference to 2300 days in Daniel 8. As suggested in the digression about 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel', these time periods may have referred to potential periods which had the possibility of extension and reduction- in accordance with the strange mixture of Divine grace, the intercession of Jesus, the prayers of believers, the repentance of Israel... and perhaps other factors. In Daniel's own experience, the 70 years of exile was a period which was extended. "The days" are likened to "the days of Noah" (:37). In the days of Noah again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages would therefore seem to be teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

Be saved- "Saved" here ("there should no flesh be saved") may mean 'delivered'; it will appear that none of us will survive the tribulation, "but for the elects' sake those days shall be shortened" and we will be saved by the second coming. Thus 2 Pet. 3:12,15 reminds us that by our prayers and spiritual development, the days before the second coming will be shortened. If they were not, even the elect would lose their faith (Mt. 24:22)- showing how those of us who are alive at Christ's coming will *barely* survive the spiritual traumas of the last days. The virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching; and Peter says that the righteous in the last generation (see context) will *scarcely* be saved (1 Pet. 4:18). So it would appear that the days of the final tribulation will be shortened, although in another sense the coming of the Lord is delayed in order to allow our greater spiritual development (Mt. 25:5). This 'delay' is why the harvest will be "over-ripe" for reaping (Rev. 14:15 RV)- or is this a reference to the lack of zeal of preachers to Israel in the last days, not harvesting the ready fruit? The Lord likens the final

tribulation to the travail of a woman to bring forth her child. But we read in Is. 66:7,8 in this same context of Israel's latter day suffering: "Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing?... for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children". This seems to imply that the expected period of Zion's travail will be cut short, and she will give spiritual birth far quicker than expected. Perhaps the Lord was alluding to this passage when He spoke of how "the days" [of Zion's labour?] shall be shortened.

The elect- Both the Lord Jesus and Israel are called "the elect" (Is. 42:1; 45:4); both are fulfilments of the servant songs in Isaiah. 1 Pet. 2:4,6 call Jesus "the elect / chosen" and then the same word is used about the believers being an elect / chosen nation (1 Pet. 2:9). The days will be shortened for the elect's sake- and this may refer to either the Lord Jesus, or the believers in Him; the shortening will be for the sake of *Christ's* intercession, as well as ours. It's tempting to understand "the elect" in the Olivet prophecy as referring to the same group- of faithful believers [or perhaps specifically Jewish ones] who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming. They are the ones who resist the temptation to be deceived in the very last days (:24) and who are snatched away at the Lord's coming "from the four winds", suggesting they are located worldwide (:31). We note that Christ on the cross was called by the same word *eklektos*- "the elect / chosen of God" (Lk. 23:35). This group will indeed have identified with His crucifixion sufferings. Perhaps this is the group of believers who are also specifically called "the elect" who fight on Mount Zion alongside Jesus against the armies of Israel's enemies (Rev. 17:14). In the immediate context, the elect or chosen ones were perhaps intended by the Lord to refer to the listening disciples. Mk. 13:20 labours the point: "For the elect's sake [*eklektos*], whom He has chosen / elected [*eklegomai*]" . The word is specifically used about the Lord's choosing of the twelve (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19; Acts 1:2). He imagined them being scattered to "the four winds" in their obedience to the great commission, but thanks to them, the days would be shortened and they themselves would be gathered to Him at His return. That was the Lord's hope and ideal intention. It didn't happen in the first century, and thus has some element of reapplication in a different context in our last days.

Shortened- see on Rom. 9:28,29; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:10. This was typified in the Joseph story. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself..." (Gen. 45:1) implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short. "For the elects sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22). The same Hebrew word in Gen. 45:1 is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days. The RV has: "had been shortened", suggesting that maybe the Lord had already been in dialogue with the Father and secured a decrease in the Father's original time period envisaged.

24:23 *Then if any man shall say unto you-* This again, spoken to the disciples, suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

Look, here is the Christ or here- "Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here... or there" [AV] is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that Christ is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that Christ's return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that Christ is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

24:24 *There shall arise... false prophets, and shall shew great signs-* The Lord is virtually quoting the words of Moses in Dt. 13:1: "When [Heb.; AV "if"] there arise among you a [false] prophet... and gives you a sign or wonder". Even if signs are given, they are not to be believed; apparent miracles are no proof that a man is of God. The Lord is here asserting Himself as the new Moses. The appearance of miraculous "signs" was important in Judaism in order to identify Messiah- hence they asked the Lord to produce such signs (12:38; 16:1; Jn. 2:18; 4:48; 6:30; 1 Cor. 1:22 "the Jews require a sign"). The Lord had refused to respond, even though He had done many miracles. He said that "no sign" would be given to that generation apart from that of Jonah- i.e., His resurrection. It was "a wicked and adulterous generation [that] seeks after a sign" (16:4). The disciples likewise assumed that there was to be such a "sign" predicting the Lord's coming (24:3). On one level it could be argued that the Lord's answer is actually a refusal to give them such a miraculous "sign" from Him; rather did He give them descriptions of what would happen in the world. He had said the same, in essence, to the Jews when they demanded such a miraculous "sign" of Him; He said they would be given no such sign, but rather they were to discern the "signs [s.w.] of the times" (16:3,4). And this effectively is how He answers the disciples when at the beginning of the Olivet prophecy they likewise ask for a "sign". He responds by giving them a list of "signs of the times". However, it would seem from :30 that there will in fact be the "sign" of Messiah visible in the sky- but only in the very last [few?] days before the forcible establishment of His Kingdom. This will be in opposition to the "signs"

shown by the false prophets. More detail is given in Rev. 13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20 where we read of the beast system and false prophet doing signs by which they deceived the people in the earth / land. This is an expansion upon the Lord's warning against being deceived by such signs. And the same scenario is found in 2 Thess. 2:9, where we find the man of sin sitting in the latter day temple doing "signs and lying wonders" (same words as here in Mt. 24:24), to be destroyed in the final conflict with the real Christ.

False prophets- There is ample evidence that in the lead up to the Babylonian invasion which typifies that of the last days, Jeremiah had to work amid considerable opposition from false prophets who mocked his prophecies of impending Arab victory and the need to repent; they will have their counterparts among the ranks of modern Judaism in the last days (Lam. 2:14; Jer. 20:6; 28:1-9; 29:24-26; Zech. 13:2-5). Perhaps it is such false prophets within Israel which our Lord spoke of in Mt. 24:24. But there's no need to speculate too much- when these things come to pass, it will be crystal clear to those aware of the prophecy that we've now reached that stage. In the A.D.70 possibility of fulfilment, these people operated under the umbrella of fundamentalist Judaism, as they will in the last days. Their false bearing of the Lord's name (Mt. 24:5) alludes back to the pseudo-prophets of Jeremiah's time doing the same (Jer. 14:14). Zedekiah's trauma of being torn between wanting to accept the words of the false prophets whilst inwardly knowing the truth of Jeremiah's words, will perhaps be repeated in the leadership of latter-day Israel, to whom the Elijah ministry will teach the true word of God. The apparent mimicry of Jeremiah's style by the false prophets will perhaps be seen in the last days too.

If it were possible- The possibility of deception may be precluded by the fact that the elect, by reason of being the elect, will not be deceived. But there may also be the suggestion that it is impossible to deceive the elect because they are preserved from such deception. The Father and Son are willing and able to "keep you from falling" by sealing or preserving the faithful from such deception. The element of God's work over and above human freewill effort is itself indicated by the very term "the elect"; those chosen, by God and not of themselves.

Deceive- A major theme of the prophecy (:4,5,11). As observed under :23 *Look, here is the Christ or here*, the need for this urgent warning requires that the claimants have far more credibility than such persons have today.

24:25 *I have told you before*- The intention of prophecy is that when it is fulfilled, then all is clear to the believers and they are thereby guided and strengthened. This will be particularly true in those last few days when the sign of the Son of Man is in the sky (:30), everyone somehow knows Christ is about to come- and inevitably false claimants will arise, perhaps one particular one will claim to be Christ and will go to battle against the real Christ. Hence the repetition of the Lord's warning about not being deceived by this person or related claims.

24:26 This appears to be a laboured repetition of the warning in :23- see notes there. The Lord is really underlining the possibility of deception by false claims to be Him in the very last days of the tribulation. He will not be hidden "in" anything nor anywhere- His coming will be as clear as lightning.

In the desert, go not forth- These are the identical Greek words as used about how the people of Jerusalem 'went forth' into the 'desert' to see John the Baptist (11:7 "what *went you out* into the *desert* to see"; 3:1), and how the crowds went out to see the Lord Himself in the "desert place" (14:13,15). It will not be a question of going forth to see Jesus, as it had been until recently in the Lord's ministry. Now it will be too late for that- His coming will be evident to all. Yet the Lord has introduced the Olivet prophecy by saying that the house of the temple has been left unto them "desolate", the same word translated "desert" (23:38). He may be saying that any idea that He has appeared lurking around the desolated temple area will likewise be false; He will not be in any "secret chamber" of that temple. This would explain the parallel between "desert" and "secret chamber". Do not "go forth" uses the same word as the Lord goes on to use in :27- His coming will be as the lightning 'goes forth'. They will not go to Him, He will come to them. But He is talking here concerning the unbelievers. The faithful will have already 'fled', and I have suggested that their dropping all things, even their jackets, to respond to that call is nothing less than their response to the news that 'He's back'. The same word translated "go forth" is used in 25:1,6 about the need to "go forth" and meet Him, and how the unfaithful amongst the ecclesia will delay in response to that call. Again, Revelation provides more detail, using the same word to describe the latter day call to 'go forth out of' Babylon or else they will be destroyed along with her (Rev. 18:4).

Secret chambers- Seeing they were sitting near the temple, the reference would contextually have been to the chambers of the temple; see on *In the desert*.

24:27 *The lightning*- This is the "lightning" and earthquake associated with the return of Christ when His people, natural and spiritual, are at the nadir of persecution and tribulation (Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).

As the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west- Lightning doesn't do this. The reference is therefore to the Old Testament manifestation of lightning as part of the Cherubim, which flashed with lightning (Ez. 1:4,14). Ezekiel saw the Cherubim depart from the temple (24:1 has alluded to this already), go Eastward to the mount of Olives and then mount up to Heaven (Ez. 10 :19; 11 :22,23). This is why "the Glory", the lightning of the Cherubim chariot, was seen as returning to the Mount of Olives "by the way of the east" into the temple (Ez. 43:2-4).

The Lord had earlier used these very same words in Lk. 17:20-24: "The Kingdom of God comes not with observation [it wouldn't be as if a series of signs were fulfilled and people could see the Kingdom of God inching nearer over the decades]. Nor shall they say 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' [this is Mt. 24:23 " 'Look here!' or 'Look there!'"]. For the Kingdom of God [a title of Messiah] is amongst you... They shall say to you [in the final tribulation], 'See here' or 'See there' [this again is Mt. 24:23,26]; go not after them, nor follow them [Mt. 24:26 "Go not forth... believe it not"]. For as the lightning that lightens out of the one part of Heaven and shines unto the other part under Heaven, so shall also the Son of Man be in His day... they shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man". The connection would suggest that as the Lord stood amongst them, He was the Son of Man in His day. Those who accepted Him as Messiah were accepting His 'coming' to them. For those who did not, and who argued about whether or not He fulfilled all the prophecies they were analyzing ["with observation"], He would 'come' unmistakably, but in judgment.

So shall the coming of the Son of Man be- No more doubt can be allowed that the *parousia* is visible and not invisible. The Lord is here specifically warning against any idea that His *parousia* is somehow invisible. Jehovah's pseudo-Witnesses and preterists need to take this far more seriously. The point must be driven home that *parousia* *always* refers to the physical presence of a person. There is another Greek word frequently translated 'coming' which is more flexible in meaning, but *parousia* means 'a literal being alongside', and is always used in that way:-

- "As the lightning cometh out of the east... so shall also the *coming (parousia)* of the son of man be" (Mt. 24:27).

- "The day that Noe entered into the ark... the flood came... so shall also the coming of the son of man be" (:38,39).

24:28 *For where the carcase is*- This whole verse has various possible interpretations which each seem to me to have things to commend them and yet also their own problems. The key word is "For". This verse is an expansion upon the Lord's teaching that His coming will be visible, will be as the lightning of judgment upon those who have not "gone forth" to Him, and no credence should be given to any claims He has come invisibly. The Lord may be likening His coming to the coming down from the sky of eagles upon the carcase- of Israel. This could have had an AD70 fulfilment in the 'eagles' of the Roman legions, just as Yahweh's Old Testament 'comings' in judgment upon Israel were at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian armies. But the final coming of Divine judgment will be in the literal, personal coming of God's Son to earth in judgment. The same Greek word translated "where" is found in Mk. 13:14- the abomination of desolation will stand "*where* it ought not". It could be that this location on the temple mount is what the Lord has in view. This is where He will come down in judgment. Upon the very location He was then standing upon with the disciples, the pride and glory of an apostate Judaism. It was already no more than a carcase in God's eyes. The temple was "where [s.w.] the Jews always resort" (Jn. 18:20). The carcase or dead body may not necessarily refer to Israel. If we take Rev. 11:8,9 as an expansion of the Olivet prophecy, we find the same Greek word used about the dead bodies of the faithful remnant who share their Lord's death in Jerusalem and lay exposed for three days- perhaps literal days. The metaphor of the eagles coming speaks of Divine judgment from Heaven, ultimately in the personal coming of Christ to earth. In this case, the eagles would come because of the dead bodies / carcase of those who had died the death of Christ in Jerusalem in the final tribulation. The Greek word for "carcase", *ptoma*, literally means 'a fallen one', and is from the verb *pipto*, to fall. And this word is used about the fall of Jerusalem- also in Revelation 11. The city "fell" (Rev. 11:13), just as Jerusalem was to "fall by the edge of the sword" (Lk. 21:24).

The carcase- It's possible that the Lord intended us to understand the carcase as Jerusalem, and the vultures as the latter day invaders of Israel (Jer. 4:13). Or it has been suggested by Harry Whittaker that "If you (my disciples) show yourselves to be spiritually a carcase (as in Rev. 3:1), you will certainly find yourselves the prey of these "vultures," the false teachers". The question is similar to that in Lk. 17:37, where this is said in answer to the question: "Where, Lord?". This may not necessarily mean 'to where'. That the Roman invasion of AD67-70 was a detailed fulfilment of some parts of the Mosaic prophecies of curses for disobedience is well known and chronicled. Our Lord's quotation of Dt. 28:26 in here in :28 ("your carcasses shall be meat unto the fowls of the air") is confirmation of this.

To there will the eagles be gathered- I suggested under *For where the carcase is* that this may refer to the coming of Christ down from Heaven in judgment upon either the carcase of Israel, or for the sake of the carcasses of the slain believers. The Greek for "eagle", *aetos*, literally means

'one of the air [*aer*]', and *aer* is used of how the Lord Jesus will come in the "air" [*aer*] with the faithful in judgment (1 Thess. 4:17- note that this part of 1 Thessalonians is full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy). This would be the pouring out of the seventh vial into "the air" [*aer*], when finally "It is done" (Rev. 16:17).

The Lord's usage of similar language in Lk. 17:37 must, however, be given its due weight. There the Lord speaks of the gathering of the eagles in terms of explaining how His people will be gathered to Him and judgment. The same word for 'gather' is used repeatedly for the gathering of the faithful in the last days (3:12; 13:30; 25:26,32; Jn. 15:6). Most notably, we find it used in 1 Thess. 4:14, comforting the believers that God will at the last day 'gather' the dead believers at the last day (AV "will God *bring* with Him"). This will be the "gathering together unto Him" (2 Thess. 2:1 s.w.). This is all impressive evidence that the language of 'gathering' is used about the gathering of the believers to Christ at His coming, and according to 1 Thess. 4:16,17 this will involve a literal being snatched away [from persecution, according to the Olivet prophecy]. Just as the believers will be led / gathered to human judgment seats (Mk. 13:11, *ago*), gathered / lead / brought [*ago*] before human kings (Lk. 21:12), so they will be gathered to the judgment seat of Christ the King [*sun-ago*].

The Lord responds to the question about how we will get to judgment by saying that eagles fly to where the body is. It's possible to interpret eagles as Angels- e.g. Rev. 8:13 speaks of an Angel flying through the sky in the last day, crying 'woe' - the Greek *ouai* would've been understood as an imitation of the noise an eagle makes. And there are other links between Rev. 8 and Mt. 24. So perhaps the Lord's answer was that we are not to worry about getting there, as our Angels will take us to judgment. Zech. 14:5 speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus "and all the holy ones with him". But it is applied to the believers in 1 Thess. 3:13 and to the Angels in 2 Thess. 1:7. In this sense, the believers come with their Angels to judgment; but because the process happens in a moment of time, it appears that in fact Jesus returns with the faithful. This is why elsewhere the Lord Jesus is described as returning both with Angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Lk. 9:26) and with the saints (Rev. 19:14 cp. 17:14).

One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. Whilst this may seem an inappropriate symbol, it wouldn't be the only time the Bible uses language which we may deem unfitting. Consider how Ps. 78:65,66 likens God to a drunk man awakening and flailing out at His enemies, striking them in the private parts. I always have to adjust my specs and read this again before I can really accept that this is what it says. So in Mt. 24:28, the Lord seems to be responding to the disciples' query about the physicalities of the future judgment by saying that in reality, His crucifixion would in essence be their judgment, and this is what they should rather concern themselves with.

They would gather together unto it and through this know the verdict upon them, all quite naturally, as eagles are gathered by natural instinct to the carcass. The thief on the cross wanted the Lord to remember him for good at judgment day. Yet He replied that He could tell him today, right now, the result of the judgment- the thief would be accepted. It's as if the Lord even in that agony of mind and body... realized keenly that He, there, that fateful afternoon, was sitting in essence on the judgment throne. And for us too, the Lord on Calvary is our constant and insistent judge. It could even be that when the Lord told the Sanhedrin that they would see the son of man coming in judgment (Mk. 14:62), He was referring to the cross. For how will they exactly see Him coming in judgment at the last day?

24:29 *Immediately after the tribulation*- The phrase *eutheos meta* doesn't necessarily have to mean 'and then, after that', in a chronological sense (although it can mean that). It could refer to things going on at the same time, *meta* the tribulation. The tribulation is that spoken of in :21 "Then shall be great tribulation". Verses 22-28 are therefore a parenthesis, developing the theme that false Christs shall appear, but we should not be taken in by them because the Lord's coming will be literally visible and crystal clear to all. The "tribulation" will be "immediately" followed by the Lord's return. Yet the "tribulation" of :21 was clearly initially relevant to the destruction of the temple in AD70. There was a rescheduling of the Divine program, just as has happened so often in prophetic history, not least in the promised restoration of the Kingdom not happening after the 70 years in Babylon.

"The tribulation" is explained in Luke's record as being Jerusalem being "trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24). After this, in Luke's record, there are the signs in sun, moon and stars which Matthew's record also describes- as coming "immediately *meta* the tribulation". The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appear to refer to the time of Gentile domination of Jerusalem, and yet it is reapplied to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25. And yet the application to Jerusalem's tribulation may remain true ultimately, in the very last days. For the allusion is to Zech. 12:3: "In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people (i.e. all around Israel, as this often means): all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it". The Septuagint renders the first phrase as "a stone trodden down by the Gentiles", clearly alluded to by Jesus in His description of Jerusalem being captured by the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24). Those who are 'gathered together' against Jerusalem must be the Arabs, according to the Zechariah context. The rejected likewise will be burdened with a heavy stone (Mt. 18:6), showing that they will share the judgments of Israel's enemies. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for three and a half years, until the times of the Gentiles are

fulfilled. 'Jebus', the old name for Jerusalem, means 'downtrodden'. This hints that the liberation of Jebus at the beginning of David's reign was seen by Christ as typical of the time when He would liberate Jerusalem from downtreading, at his return. This suggests that the times of Gentile domination of Jerusalem are to be ended by the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's second coming; we are yet to see, therefore, a Gentile domination of Jerusalem before Christ's coming.

The Lord predicted that the final tribulation- which He says is that prophesied in Daniel- would be followed "immediately" by His return. The evil man who places the desolating abomination meets his end in war (Dan. 11:45)- just as the same individual does in Daniel 8:23. And this leads in to the resurrection and judgment at the Lord's return (Dan. 12:1,2). So the Lord's own interpretation of Daniel 11 leaves us with no doubt that the whole section about the abomination and the individual responsible for it applies to our last days. Any partial fulfilment it may have had in Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero or Titus only makes those men prototypes of the final abuser yet to come.

It is at this time, *after* the fall of Jerusalem, that we read of "the sea and the waves roaring" (Lk. 21:25). There are many prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel of Babylon being at war with the Arab nations who supported her in the attack on Jerusalem, e.g. concerning Ammon (Ez. 21:20) and Tyre (Ez. 26:7). Ammon is mentioned as *escaping* out of the hand of the king of the North during his invasion of Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 11:41). This shows that there will be much inter-Arab conflict both before and during Israel's prolonged desolation period. "The sea and the waves roaring" at the time of Israel's final suffering (Lk. 21:25) is a figure taken from Jer. 49:23 concerning the Arab nations around Israel being like the troubled sea in their fighting with each other. However, the outstanding inter-Arab conflicts will be temporarily forgotten in the last days to concentrate on a combined push against Jerusalem. But once this is captured, the old rivalries will suddenly violently surface, which is how God will destroy the invaders and save the righteous remnant who are still barely alive in the sewers and basements of Jerusalem. It seems that the beasts of Dan. 7 are only different aspects of the one great beast which finally emerges. Daniel sees them all come up together after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3), connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25).

The sun shall be darkened- After the tribulation, as it was when Jesus died (Lk. 23:45 s.w.). Israel's tribulation will make them understand what He went through. The context has been the Lord's insistence that His coming will be obviously visible, like lightening in the sky, and the reference to "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" / the sky (:30) would suggest that a literal sign in the sky is what the Lord has in mind. The allusion to the crucifixion would also require a literal element of fulfilment. The additional information given in Rev. 8:12; 9:2 suggests that this

darkening of sun and stars happens progressively, although that may be over a period of only a few literal days. There are reports of such signs being seen over Jerusalem in the lead up to AD70, the appearance of comets etc. However it seems to me that Josephus had access to the Olivet prophecy and some of the wording of his historical claims is so similar to the Lord's words that I personally doubt the degree of real fulfilment that was going on; rather do I suspect he was consciously alluding to the Lord's words and wishing to see them fulfilled in the history he was recording. That is not the same thing as AD70 actually fulfilling in detail the Olivet prophecy.

Sun... moon... stars- Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; Joel 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever". Only here do we find "sun, moon, and stars" combined with "sea and waves roaring" as in the Olivet prophecy in Luke 21. In Luke He spoke of "On the earth distress of *nations* (Gentile nations causing distress in the earth / land of Israel) with perplexity... men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth (or land, of Israel)". The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX).

"Immediately after the tribulation... shall all the tribes of the earth (land- of Israel) mourn, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming" (:29,30) is followed immediately by the fig tree parable. The chronology seems clear- a tribulation, repentance of Israel (note the allusions to the mourning of Zech.12 and 13), and then the second coming, with the fig tree parable about the repentance of Israel added as a footnote to this part of the prophecy.

Stars shall fall- The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall "as a fig tree casts her unripe figs". This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning.

Shall be shaken- The events of judgment day will be a 'shaking' of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be "shaken", s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the "heavens" would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

24:30 *Then shall appear-* Matthew began his Gospel with the same word and idea, speaking of the 'appearance' of the star which heralded the coming of the Son of Man (2:7). The Lord has just used the same word in speaking of how His coming would be as the lightning shines or appears in the sky (:27). This, along with the allusion to the star seen by the wise men, encourage us to think of this final "sign of the Son of Man" as a literal appearance in the sky, strengthening our suggestion that the signs in the sun, moon and stars in :29 are likewise to be interpreted literally. Jn. 1:5 perhaps puts all this in more spiritual terms by likening the Lord to a light shining [s.w. "appear"] in Jewish darkness, unperceived. Now is the day to perceive Him as He is, rather than too late at His return. These signs of the Lord's return will be in the sky for the world; the faithful will have already dropped all and fled, to Him, knowing He has come. How they will be called to go forth to meet Him isn't altogether clear, although 2 Pet. 1:19 uses the same word translated "appear" in speaking of how when the day of His coming dawns, i.e. begins, the day star will arise shining brightly in our hearts.

The sign of the Son of Man- As noted earlier, it was exactly such a visible sign that the disciples and the Jews wanted in order to know Jesus was Messiah and that He had returned (see on :23). The Lord had explained at least twice that no such sign would be given. But now He is saying that all too late, such a sign would be given. For now, we are to believe without such signs written up in the sky. If "the sign of the son of man" which appears over Israel and leads the tribes of Israel to mourn in repentance is a literal vision of the Angel-cherubim, then this has a basis in Jacob seeing the Angelic vision in the time of his distress.

All tribes of the earth shall mourn- "Tribes", *phule*, is used exclusively of the tribes of Israel, until the references in Revelation to people of all nations, tribes and languages having representatives who were redeemed, being under the power of the beast etc. Even those references could be understood as referring to the tribes of Israel, along with the nations of the Gentile world. But "the earth" often refers to the land, of Israel. And the idea of tribes mourning is clearly referring to the prophecy of Zech. 12:10-14 that the tribes of Israel will mourn when they see the once crucified Christ, still with the marks in His body testifying to His crucifixion. Rev. 1:7 uses the same language. Israel will finally all repent when they see the sign of the Son of Man- and then, He will return literally and visibly in the clouds. The call of John the Baptist and the Lord's own preachers had been for Israel to "mourn" in repentance (11:17). This they had

not done as intended, but they shall do so at His actual return. They who had laughed in this life will mourn then in rejection (Lk. 6:25; James 4:9); their repentance will be too late. Another possibility is that the impenitent amongst Israel will die in the final tribulation as outlined in Zech. 14, and these who mourn are those who repent and are accepted; for Zech. 12:14 adds the detail that the tribes who mourn will be those "that remain", who are [so the Hebrew means] 'the remnant'. But see below on *They shall see*.

Mourn... see- A play on words in the Greek: *kopsontai... opsontai*. The intention of this paronomasia is that Israel's repentant mourning is directly related to their seeing Him in the sense that His visible return only happens once they repent. When "all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]... then shall they see the Son of man coming". Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns.

They shall see- The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. This is why the pronouns change from "they" here to "you" when talking again to the faithful disciples in :33. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" here in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

The foolish virgins want to go to buy oil; they make a foolish excuse, seeing the shops were evidently shut. These are those who mourn and wail when they see the sign of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7). They want to hide from Him, as Adam and the rejected of Rev. 6:16. Then they compose themselves and go to meet Him, persuading themselves that they will be accepted by Him (because later they are surprised).

The Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven - Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (:31) is reminiscent of the Lord's ascension, at which the Angels promised His return "in like manner"; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible 'coming' in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow 'came' in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

Coming- The moment of the second coming (:27 *parousia*) is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it's not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately after the tribulation of those days* ("in *those days*, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70 to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

In the clouds- This clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the signs in the heavenly bodies of :29 are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

Power and great glory- The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when “the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds” (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is “the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John’s equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ’s glory now, insofar as they perceive the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that “When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory”. His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ’s coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein’s theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

24:31 *Send His Angels-* The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / ‘angels’ reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God’s victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We’re in tandem with them. The nature of our response to the Gospel when we hear it in this life is essentially our response to the call to judgment at the last day. The very same Greek words translated “Send... Angels” are to be found in the description of John the Baptist being sent to gather men to the Lord Jesus: “I send My messenger before Your face” (Mt. 11:10). The idea is clearly that those who had responded to John’s message of repentance and faith in Christ’s forgiveness have in essence already been gathered for the Kingdom. And yet Israel generally had stoned those sent [s.w.] unto them (23:37- the Lord said this introducing the Olivet prophecy).

Trumpet- The trumpet associated with the Lord’s second coming in Rev. 11:15? The trumpet associated with our change to immortality in 1 Cor. 15:52, “the trump of God” associated with the resurrection and gathering in 1 Thess. 4:16.

Gather together His elect- Alluded to in 2 Thess. 2:1 "our gathering together unto Him". However, a case can be made that the believers are already with Christ when He comes in the clouds. Therefore the "elect" could possibly refer specifically to natural Israel rather than the believers. If the reference is to the believers, this creates a chronological issue- although see on 24:30 *Power and great glory*. The Angels will be sent out to gather together the elect, but Angels will also be 'sent forth' to "gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (13:41). It seems that this 'gathering out' will be achieved by the more positive 'gathering together' of the faithful. The point of gathering is the point of division between good and bad; our response to the certain news that 'He's back' will decide the outcome of our judgment. 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. Just as eagles mount up into the air and come down where the carcass is, so we will come to judgment. 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.

To the uttermost part of heaven (Mk. 13:27)- Is this a reference to the believers being "caught away in clouds, into the air, for the purpose of meeting the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17)? It seems also an allusion to the lightning of :27. The Lord's coming and His gathering of the elect is all in the same moment; and yet there are apparently various things which must occur all at the same time. The apparent contradictions in chronology need not worry us- see on :31 *Power and great glory*.