

# The Coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:15–35)

By Jacob D. Gerber

In Matthew 24:3, Jesus' disciples had asked him two questions: "Tell us, when will these things be [i.e., that the temple will be destroyed; Matt. 24:2], and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" In Matthew 24:4–14, Jesus gave a general exhortation to his disciples not to be led astray or to be deceived by those who claim to be the christ, or by the tumult of the nations, or by outright persecution. That is, Jesus warned his disciples not to interpret any of those events as the "sign of [his] coming and of the end of the age." As he begins to explain how the destruction of the temple will come about, he makes a stunning claim for how to understand the events that would unfold in the coming years: as tribulation comes, we can be certain that *Jesus Christ is reigning triumphant in heaven*.

## Earthly Tribulation (Matt. 24:15–28)

In v. 15, Jesus begins to give more specific instructions about how his people should prepare for the events leading to the destruction of the temple.<sup>1</sup> Jesus instructs his disciples to watch out for "the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place," and Matthew adds, "let the reader understand" (v. 15). Daniel wrote about the "abomination of desolation" (as Hagner translates, "the abomination 'that makes desolate'") in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11, and those prophecies were understood to have been fulfilled by the actions of "the erection by Antiochus IV ('Epiphanes' = '[god] manifest') of an altar of Zeus upon the altar of Yahweh in the temple in 167 B.C. when Antiochus conquered Jerusalem....So horrific was this event, however, that it became a convenient and elastic symbol for the great evils that were to engulf the people in the future, evils that could point to the struggles prior to the eschatological era itself."<sup>2</sup> Here, Jesus speaks of an abomination of desolation that would occur at some point in the future (from his perspective). The description, *abomination of desolation*, "characterizes the abomination according to the effect it must produce, namely desolate the desecrated Temple, leave it empty of worshippers."<sup>3</sup> It is important to note then, that in Daniel 12:11, the abomination of desolation is specifically associated with the end of the Jewish sacrificial system: "And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days" (Dan.

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<sup>1</sup> "Without having answered the second of the disciples' questions ('What will be the sign?'—v. 3), Jesus turns back to the first. When will the destruction of the temple take place? Presumably after these preliminary events that do not actually herald the end. But v. 15 does not begin with 'then,' merely 'when.'" (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 357.)

<sup>2</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 700.

<sup>3</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 937.

12:11).<sup>4</sup>

To which event, then, do these prophecies refer? France summarizes the possibilities that have been proposed:

Our limited knowledge of events in first-century Palestine has prompted three main proposals of historical events which might have been recognized as the “devastating pollution” by those who had heard of Jesus’ prediction. (a) In A.D. 40 the emperor Gaius gave orders for a statue of himself to be set up in the temple at Jerusalem; fortunately the order had still not been carried out when Gaius was assassinated in A.D. 41, thus averting what would have been a bloody uprising. (b) Probably during the winter of A.D. 67/8 the Zealots took over the temple as their headquarters, and Josephus speaks with horror of the way they “invaded the sanctuary with polluted feet” and mocked the temple ritual, while the sanctuary was defiled with blood as factional fighting broke out (Josephus, *War*, 4.150–57, 196–207). (c) When the Roman troops eventually broke into the temple, the presence of their (idolatrous) standards in the sacred precincts would inevitably remind Jews of Antiochus; Josephus even mentions Roman soldiers offering sacrifices to their standards in the temple courts (*War* 6.316). Luke’s parallel to this verse (Luke 21:20, “Jerusalem surrounded by armies”) apparently understands the “devastating pollution” in this sense.<sup>5</sup>

While the Scriptures do not confirm which of these possibilities (if any) fulfill Jesus’ prophecy, there are two reasons for leaning toward (c), in my opinion. First, the context of this prophecy follows Jesus’ prophecy about the destruction of the temple and the disciples’ question about “when will these things be” (Matt. 24:2, 3). Second, in the parallel account in Luke, Jesus says, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near” (Luke 21:20).<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, it seems best to understand that Jesus has the invasion of Rome for the destruction of the temple in mind. Even here, however, the abomination of desolation in AD 70, like the abomination of desolation in 167 BC, were symbolic of a larger abomination of desolation in the future.<sup>7</sup>

When his disciples see this abomination of desolation, Jesus instructs his disciples to flee to the mountains as quickly as possible (v. 16). There is no time to rescue something from the house, nor to pick up a cast off cloak (vv. 17–18). Further, Jesus’ disciples must prepare themselves for the difficulties especially to those women who are pregnant or caring for nursing children (v. 19). Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> Calvin characterizes this passage as referring to “the *final* abrogation of the services of the Law, which was to take place at the coming of Christ.” (Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 3:132.)

<sup>5</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 912–13. France is not fully convinced of any of these options: “It seems wiser not to claim a specific tie-up with recorded history, but to recognize that desecration of the temple was an ever-present threat once the Roman invasion had been provoked.”

<sup>6</sup> Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 857.

<sup>7</sup> “As far as treating both with clear distinction in the same discourse is concerned, who can object when the destruction of Jerusalem, like the Flood and like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, is made a type of the end of the world?” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 936.)

also laments the possibility that the flight may take place in bad weather (winter) or on a Sabbath, “when the country is filled with fanatical Jews, who would become furious at a supposed desecration of the Sabbath” (v. 20).<sup>8</sup> Jesus warns that they must flee because this will be a uniquely difficult tribulation: “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short” (vv. 21–22).

In addition to warning them to flee for their physical safety, Jesus also warns his disciples to be on the alert not to be deceived by “false christs and false prophets” (vv. 23–26). These figures—and those spreading their false gospels—will promise that they have found the Christ, and those figures will “perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (v. 24). This does not mean that they *will* deceive God’s elect, but only that it will be their purpose to do so. Jesus gives these warnings “beforehand” (v. 25), so that his disciples will not go seeking for Christ on earth. Instead, Jesus promises that, “as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (v. 27). Morris puts this idea well:

The coming of the Messiah will not be some secret thing such that only those with special knowledge will be able to say where the Messiah is. Jesus likens his coming to *the lightning*. Nobody needs to be told where the lightning is. When it flashes, the whole sky is lit up from east to west. The coming of the lightning is a coming that thrusts itself on our notice; we cannot overlook it. *The coming of the Son of man* will be like that. It will be open and public; nobody will need to be told about it.<sup>9</sup>

Then, Jesus closes this section with a difficult figure of speech: “Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather” (v. 28). This could be understood in a variety of ways, for example, as referring to the scattering of people seeking after false Messiahs (“wherever the corpse is”),<sup>10</sup> or to the clarity of Christ’s return: “as surely as you know that where you see vultures gathered there is a carcass, so you will not be able to miss the coming of the Son of Man.”<sup>11</sup>

## Heavenly Triumph (Matt. 24:29–31)

Although there are many difficult details in Matthew 24, vv. 29–31 is by far the most difficult to interpret in the chapter, and possibly in the whole Gospel of Matthew. Most take this as a reference to Christ’s *final* return—that is, to his παρουσία (*parousia*). I, however, am persuaded by R. T. France that this is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem’s temple, and to Christ’s ascension, enthronement, and vindication as he reigns from heaven to build his kingdom—*before* his final return. Before studying the details of this passage, I want to list out three reasons that have persuaded me toward this approach.

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<sup>8</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 939.

<sup>9</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 607.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 3:143.

<sup>11</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 707.

## Reasons for Seeing Matt. 24:29–31 as a Reference to Christ’s Exaltation and Vindication

First, as we will see below, the language of the sun being darkened, the moon falling, etc., is Old Testament imagery that describes the overthrow of spiritual authorities by the judgment of something on earth. Although most see a final judgment in view, the context thus far has been about the destruction of the temple—indeed, the making *desolate* of the temple. As we noted earlier, Daniel 12:11 speaks about this desolation in terms of taking away the sacrificial system. Thus, it is also possible to read this as a reference to the overthrow of the Jewish ceremonial system, especially in its corrupted form under the legalism of the Jewish leaders.

Second, regarding the context, Jesus has been responding to two sets of questions: (1) “when will these things [regarding the destruction of the temple] be”; and (2) “and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). Commentators who take vv. 29–31 as a reference to the final return of Jesus struggle mightily to explain how Jesus moves back and forth in answering these questions, especially when Jesus (1) says that the events of vv. 29–31 will happen “immediately” (v. 29) after the tribulation, and (2) promises in the next section that “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (v. 34). If we can rightly understand vv. 29–31 as a reference to Jesus’ exaltation and reign from heaven—especially at the overthrow of the temple in Jerusalem—then we can understand that Jesus is not moving back and forth in his answers to the two questions, but that he continues to answer the first question. Then, in v. 36, France notes that Jesus uses the transitional phrase *περί δέ* (*peri de*), which is a transition that often marks a change in subject to answer a specific, new question that someone else has also raised (see Matt. 22:31; see also especially 1 Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; Acts 21:25; 1 Thess. 4:9; 5:1).<sup>12</sup> I am persuaded by France’s argument that it is *there* that Jesus transitions from answering the first question (about the destruction of the temple, which would take place before that generation died out) to answering the second question (about Christ’s final return, which still has not taken place).

Third, although obscured in English, the “coming” of the Son of Man on the clouds in v. 30 is the general word for “come” (*ἐρχόμενον*; *erchomenon*), and not the word that appears in v. 27 for “the coming [*παρουσία*; *parousia*] of the Son of Man.”<sup>13</sup> This “coming” of the Son of Man “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” in v. 30 is an allusion to Daniel 7:13–14, and it foreshadows what Jesus will say at his trial “But I tell you, *from now on* you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming [*ἐρχόμενον*; *erchomenon*] on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64). As France argues about both passages, Jesus has a “coming” of the Son of Man in mind that begins immediately after his death rather than being delayed until his final return.<sup>14</sup>

That said, it is important to differentiate this interpretation of vv. 29–31 from a view of full preterism, which believes that *everything* in Matthew 24 was fulfilled in AD 70, so that there will be *no* future return of Christ. The rest of Scripture flatly contradicts such a view, since the return of Christ is the great hope of believers. Rather, Jesus will begin to address the uncertain date of his return beginning in Matthew 24:36, and he will continue his discussion of his final return (his

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<sup>12</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 936.

<sup>13</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 924.

<sup>14</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 923–24.

*parousia*, including the final judgment) all the way through end of Matthew 25.<sup>15</sup> In following the minority view in France’s exegesis, I am not denying any major doctrine of the return of Christ, but only interpreting this specific section as teaching a different doctrine (namely, Christ’s exaltation and heavenly reign) than is normally recognized.

### Exposition of Matt. 24:29–31

Again, most commentators understand v. 29 as a reference to Christ’s judgment at his final return.<sup>16</sup> France, however, points to the difficulty of the word “immediately,” which commentators struggle to interpret in light of the preceding material about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Instead, France urges that we give greater consideration to the meaning of the imagery in v. 29 in light of similar imagery in the Old Testament:

The words of v. 29 which follow the opening temporal phrase, while not a simple verbatim quotation, are so closely modeled on two OT passages that they are appropriately set out in the translation above as a poetic allusion. The first two lines are taken from Isa 13:10: the words are almost all the same as those of the LXX, though the first clause has been recast (“it will be darkened as the sun rises” becomes “the sun will be darkened”). That same text also speaks of the “stars of heaven” not giving their light, which links up with the thought of the second allusion, but the latter is in fact verbally closer to Isa 34:4. In this case the echo is less exact, but the LXX Isaiah text speaks both of the stars falling from heaven and of heaven itself “rolled up like a scroll,” while the probably Hebrew text also adds the idea of the host of heaven “rotting away.” These two Isaiah texts are the most obvious sources for Jesus’ words here, but there are other examples in the OT prophets of similar imagery drawn from cosmic disorder and darkness; see Ezek 32:7–8; Amos 8:9; Joel 2:10, 30–31; 3:15. In most of these passages the immediate context is of God’s threatened judgment on cities and nations, both pagan and Israelite; in the case of Joel the judgment is already actual in the form of the locust swarms which cut off the light of the sun, though this experience is also used as a model for a more universal judgment to come. In Isa 13:10 the reference is to the coming destruction of Babylon, and in Isa 34:4 to a threatened judgment on “all nations,” which is then narrowed down specifically to Edom. Language about cosmic collapse, then, is used by the OT prophets to symbolize God’s act of judgment within history, with the emphasis on catastrophic political reversals.

When Jesus borrows Isaiah’s imagery, it is reasonable to understand it in a similar sense. If such language was appropriate to describe the end of Babylon or Edom under the judgment of God, why should it not equally describe God’s judgment on Jerusalem’s temple

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<sup>15</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 936.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 3:146; Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 946–47; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 361; Carson, “Matthew,” 567.

and the power structure which it symbolized?<sup>17</sup>

Jesus uses the language of the Old Testament to prophesy a cosmic upheaval. Just as the earth shook, rocks were split, and the dead were raised at Jesus' death, and just as there was a great earthquake at Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 27:52–53; 28:2), so the heavens will experience an upheaval as Jesus destroys the earthly temple in order to enter once and for all into his heavenly temple, made without hands (Heb. 9:24).

Then, v. 30 portrays Jesus' exaltation as king. Both for those who see this as a reference to Christ's return, as well as for my own position (following France), all recognize that Jesus is making a very clear and deliberate allusion to Daniel 7:13–14: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." Again, as noted earlier, remember that the word for the "coming" of the Son of Man is not *parousia* (of which Jesus had spoken in v. 27), but a more general word for coming. France writes:

But we have seen that in v. 27 the point of mentioning the *parousia* is actually to dissociate it from the events surrounding the destruction of the temple, and we shall see that the recurrence of *parousia* in vv. 37 and 39 is with reference not to the "coming" described here but to a different "day and hour" introduced in v. 36, whose timing, unlike that of the destruction of the temple, cannot be known. If this verse is interpreted in terms of what it actually says, rather than by merging it into a *parousia* context from which the text in fact explicitly differentiates it, there is no reason why we should not understand the "coming of the Son of Man" here in the same way as in the related texts in 16:28 and 26:64 (and, as we have suggested earlier, in 10:23, to which there is no Marcan parallel), and in the imagery of Daniel's vision, of a "coming" to God to receive sovereign power. The time of the temple's destruction will also be the time when it will become clear that the Son of Man, rejected by the leaders of his people, has been vindicated and enthroned at the right hand of God, and that it is he who is now to exercise the universal kingship which is his destiny. That is how Daniel's vision is to be fulfilled.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Jesus Christ is the person whom Daniel saw in his vision—the "son of man" who "came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him." The prophet was given a vision of Christ received into the heavenly places, as we also read prophesied in Psalm 24: "Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!" (Ps. 24:7, 9). Whereas his exaltation to the right hand of the Father was invisible, the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem was a cataclysmic, visible vindication of Christ's reign and rule in the world.

France also helps to clarify how we can understand the *earthly* destruction of the temple as the

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<sup>17</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 921–22.

<sup>18</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 923–24.

fulfillment of what the ESV translates as, “Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man...” France points out that, whereas many take the “sign” of the Son of Man *as* the appearance of the Son of Man himself (so that Christ, appearing in heaven, serves as his own sign), there is a question of whether the phrase “in heaven” should be interpreted to modify the word “the sign will appear” (i.e., “the sign will appear in heaven”) or to modify the phrase “the Son of Man” (i.e., “the Son of Man *who is in heaven*”). Grammatically, the phrase is most likely to be the latter: καὶ [and] τότε [then] φανήσεται [will appear] τὸ σημεῖον [the sign] τοῦ υἱοῦ [of the Son] τοῦ ἀνθρώπου [of Man] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ [in heaven]. Thus, the phrase “in heaven” appears at the end of this phrase, *immediately following* the phrase “Son of Man,” and quite distant from the phrase, “the sign will appear.” France writes this:

If, however, “in heaven” is taken with “the Son of Man,” the following clauses perhaps suggest an answer. The tribes are to *see* the vindication and enthronement of the Son of Man in heaven, but *how* are they to “see” it, that is, to know that it is true? Not perhaps by a celestial phenomenon, but by what is happening on earth as the temple is destroyed and the reign of the “Son-of-Man-in-heaven” begins to take effect in the gathering of his chosen people. In that case the “sign” is not a preliminary warning of an event still to come, but the visible manifestation of a heavenly reality already established, that the Son of Man is in heaven sitting at the right hand of Power (26:64).<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the tribes will mourn as they behold the desolation of Jerusalem, knowing that they are seeing the unleashed wrath of the crucified and resurrected Son of Man, who must certainly (although invisibly) be enthroned in heaven.

With this interpretation, the purpose behind v. 31 gains clarity. We are not reading about the final summoning of God’s elect to receive their ultimate reward on the last day, although there are verses that associate a trumpet with that final summons (1 Thess. 4:14–17).<sup>20</sup> The biblical imagery of a trumpet, rather, has a broader range of meaning than just a final summons. In Numbers 10:1–10, the Lord instructed Moses to make silver trumpets that would be used to *gather* his people at the tent of meeting (i.e., at the tabernacle, the precursor to the temple): “And when both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting” (Num. 10:3). Further, Psalm 47 speaks of the Lord’s kingship over all the nations, declaring, “God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet” (Ps. 47:5). In our passage, Jesus combines those images as he speaks of his own ascension and exaltation to his throne at the right hand of his Father, from which he reigns and gathers his people. Therefore, we are reading in v. 31 about the progress of the kingdom of God, as it is “proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations” (Matt. 24:14):

The sequel to the enthronement of the Son of Man as king is the gathering together of the subjects of his kingdom, his “chosen people” (see on 22:14 and cf. 24:22, 24). They will come

<sup>19</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 926.

<sup>20</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 949.

not only from Judea but from all over the world. As in vv. 29–30, the language continues to be drawn from OT prophecy. The gathering of God’s people from the ends of the earth is a recurrent OT theme (see on 8:11–12), but the passages most closely echoed here are Deut 30:4, which speaks of God “gathering” his people who were scattered “from the end of heaven to the end of heaven,” and LXX Zech 2:10 (EVV 2:6), where God says to his scattered people, “I will gather you from the four winds of heaven.” The “great trumpet blast” echoes another such regathering prophecy in Isa 27:13. These were, of course, in their original context, prophecies of the regathering of scattered *Israel*, but again Jesus’ discourse takes passages about the OT people of God and applies them to the “chosen people” of the Son of Man. We saw the same pattern in the OT allusions in 8:11–12, where those who would come “from east and west” would no longer be the scattered tribes of Israel but those whose faith in Jesus enabled them, like the Gentile centurion, to become members of God’s international kingdom.

The agents of this gathering will be “his angels” see on 13:41 and 16:27 for the idea that God’s angels also serve the Son of Man in his heavenly glory (and cf. 26:53). In human terms the ingathering of the chosen people may be expected to be through the work of human “messengers,” and it would be possible to take *angeli* here in that sense, which it carries in 11:10. But in all other uses in Matthew (including 16:28, which is also based on the vision of Dan 7) it denotes heavenly beings, and in this context of the heavenly authority of the Son of Man it probably refers to the spiritual power underlying human evangelization. The “great trumpet blast” which Matthew alone includes at this point also suits a more supernatural dimension to this ingathering.<sup>21</sup>

What an extraordinary picture! In AD 70, Christ vindicates himself against those enemies who persecuted and killed him. As the temple they defended in Jerusalem is destroyed, Christ sends his messengers to the end of the earth to gather in his elect by the preaching of his gospel. This is a work that our Lord continues, even until today.

### **Eternal Trustworthiness (Matt. 24:32–35)**

After offering a vision for the coming tribulation leading to the desolation of the temple (and, thus, the visible, earthly sign of Christ’s invisible, heavenly enthronement), Jesus repeats his warning for his disciples to be ready for the great tribulation that will come at the advance of the Roman military against Jerusalem—and the religious panic that will seek desperately after false christs and false prophets—in that day: “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he [better, ‘it’] is near, at the very gates” (v. 32–33). As we discussed in our study of Matthew 21:18–22, fig trees bear their leaves *last*, which is what surprised Jesus when he went to a

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<sup>21</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 927–28.



leafy fig tree and found no figs.<sup>22</sup> Here, Jesus uses the same principle to illustrate how we should think about the times: when his disciples would see all these things that he had discussed, “it” (i.e., the destruction of the temple) is near, at the very gates.<sup>23</sup>

As a further confirmation of the reliability of this warning, Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (v. 34). This verse is notoriously difficult for those who take vv. 29–31 as a reference to the final return of Christ; however, it is surprisingly simple to understand if we recognize vv. 29–31 in the manner argued for here.<sup>24</sup> Then, finally, Jesus insists, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (v. 35). This is not so much a prediction *that* the heaven and earth will pass away, but only a statement that, “even if (unthinkably) heaven and earth were to pass away, Jesus’ words will remain secure.”<sup>25</sup>

## Discussion Questions

1. What is the “abomination of desolation” (v. 15; Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11)? How is the abomination of desolation connected with the end of the temple’s sacrificial system (Dan. 12:11)? Why will the coming of the abomination of desolation bring great tribulation for the disciples (vv. 16–22)? How will it trigger false christs and false prophets who would seek to draw away Jesus’ disciples (vv. 23–26)? How will the disciples know that Jesus truly has returned (vv. 27–28)?
2. Why do many commentators understand vv. 29–31 as a reference to Christ’s final return? What are some reasons for understanding this passage as a description of Christ’s coming to his throne in heaven? If so, how should we understand the “cosmic disorder and darkness” (France) in v. 29? How does Daniel 7:13–14 help us interpret the “coming” of the Son of Man in v. 30? What does the trumpet gathering in of the elect signify in v. 31?
3. Why does the growth of leaves on a fig tree signal the near arrival of summer (v. 32)? What exactly is “near” in v. 33 (ESV: “he,” although the word does not appear in the Greek)? How might we understand “this generation” in v. 34 if vv. 29–31 refers to the final coming of Christ? How would we understand this if vv. 29–31 refers to the vindication and exaltation of Christ? Why does Jesus insist upon the eternal trustworthiness of his words (v. 35)?

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<sup>22</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 611.

<sup>23</sup> “Some versions (e.g., NRSV, NJB) and commentators translate ‘he is near,’ but nothing in the Greek suggests a personal subject; such a translation is suggested not by the wording of this passage but by the prior assumption that its subject is the *parousia*.” (France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 929.) The ESV also adds “he” without textual warrant for doing so.

<sup>24</sup> “It may be safely concluded that if it had not been for the embarrassment caused by supposing that Jesus was here talking about his *parousia*, no one would have thought of suggesting any other meaning for ‘this generation,’ such as ‘the Jewish race’ or ‘human beings in general’ or ‘all the generations of Judaism that reject him’ or even ‘this kind’ (meaning scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees). Such broad senses, even if they were lexically possible, would offer no help in response to the disciples’ question ‘When?’” (France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 930.)

<sup>25</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 931.

4. Why does the New Testament place such an emphasis on Christ as the temple of God (John 2:18–22; cf. Matt. 26:61)? How, then, is the church the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16–17)? Why does the New Testament place such an emphasis on the exaltation and vindication of Jesus (1 Tim. 3:16)? What is your role in helping to bring the proclamation of the gospel throughout the whole world, to gather his people into the church by faith?