

KINGDOM *of* HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Part 5: Matthew 23-25

Notes mainly from 'Matthew' by David L.
Turner; Baker Exegetical Commentary on
the New Testament



Rosebank
UNION CHURCH

Matthew Series outline - 2024

	Date	Passage	Subject	
1	28 Jan	12:46-50, 13:53-58	Hearing, seeing and doing the word of God	Narrative block
2	4 Feb	14:1-12	The Death of John the Baptist	
3	11 Feb	14:13-36	True Worship	
	(Guest speaker Sam Allberry)			
4	25 Feb	15:1-20	Religion, Tradition & the Commandments of God	
5	3 Mar	15:21-31	The Faith of a Canaanite woman	
6	10 Mar	15:32-16:12	Bread & Leaven	
7	17 Mar	16:13-20	Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ	
8	24 Mar	16:21-28	The Cross & true Discipleship	
	(Series break - 2 weeks)			
9	7 Apr	17:1-13	The Transfiguration	Fourth Discourse (Kingdom Community)
10	14 Apr	17:14-27	Faith & Freedom	
11	21 Apr	18:1-14	The Greatest in the Kingdom	
12	28 Apr	18:15-20	Disunity in the Community	
13	5 May	18:21-35	The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant	Narrative block
14	12 May	19:1-12	Teaching about Divorce	
15	19 May	19:13-30	True Riches	
16	26 May	20:1-16	The Grace of the Kingdom	
17	2 Jun	20:17-34	The Shadow of the Cross	
18	9 Jun	21:1-22	The Triumphal Entry & Cleansing of the Temple	
	(Series break - 3 weeks)			
19	7 Jul	21:23-46	The Authority of the messiah	
20	14 Jul	22:1-14	The Parable of the Wedding feast	
21	21 Jul	22:15-22	Christian Citizenship	
22	28 Jul	22:23-40	Religious Leaders interrogate Jesus	Fifth Discourse (The Future Kingdom)
23	4 Aug	22:41-23:12	Jesus questions Religious Leaders	
24	11 Aug	23:13-36 pt 1	Seven woes to the Scribes & Pharisees	
25	18 Aug	23:13-36 & 37-39	Lament over Jerusalem	
26	25 Aug	24:1-14	Signs of the End of the Age	
27	1 Sep	24:15-35	The Abomination of Desolation & the Coming of the Son of Man	
28	8 Sep	24:36-51	Prepare yourself!	
29	15 Sep	25:1-13	The Parable of the Ten Virgins	Epilogue / Conclusion
30	22 Sep	25:14-30	The Parable of the Talents	
31	29 Sep	25:31-46	The Final Judgment	
32	6 Oct	26:1-30	Preparation of the Death of Christ	
33	13 Oct	26:31-56	Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus	
34	20 Oct	26:57-68	Jesus on Trial	
35	27 Oct	26:69-27:10	Peter & Judas respond	
36	3 Nov	27:11-26	Jesus before Pilate	
37	10 Nov	27:27-56	The Crucifixion	
38	17 Nov	27:57-28:10	The Resurrection	
39	24 Nov	28:11-20	The Great Commission	

The strategic placing of Matthew 23

- The place of chapter 23 by Matthew has been understood in two ways:
 - i. As the first part of the 'Olivet discourse', connected to 24-25.
 - ii. As the culmination of Jesus's confrontations with religious leaders, which started in 21
- Arguments for (i) include the fact that there are clear connections between 23 & 24-25 like:
 - The persecution of Jesus's disciples
 - The desolation of the temple
 - The return of Jesus
- However, there are differences between these two sections, like tone, setting & majority of content.
- As for (ii), certainly the confrontation interactions with the religious establishment come to a head here. Beginning in 21:12 Jesus has answered, challenged and ultimately triumphed over the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes and Chief Priests. At this point no further dialogue is possible, and the indictments of 23 thus ensue.
- Thus begins the prophetic denouncement of the religious leaders (the seven 'woes'), followed by a lament over Jerusalem. This lament includes a hope for Jerusalem if they will call upon him.
- In this way, the judgment of Jerusalem is justified in Matt 23 before it is predicted in Matt 24-25.
- On balance then, it seems that Matthew 23 functions as a hinge or bridge that concludes the previous narrative, and prepares the reader for the last discourse.

6. Warnings to the Disciples and Woes to the Pharisees (23:1-39)

a) Warning the Disciples (v1-12)

- Jesus's warning first points out the inconsistencies of the religious leaders (v2-7), and then urges his own community to be different (v8-12).
- This means that these rebukes are not only directed to the leaders, but also meant to prevent Jesus's disciples from similar errors.
- This emphasis is additionally seen in the immediate recipients of this teaching, 'the crowds and disciples' (23:1).
- The disciples should do what the leaders say because they are Moses's proxies (v2-3a), but the disciples should not follow the leaders' example (v23b) because:
 - i. They do not practice what they preach (v3c)
 - ii. They do not serve the people they have burdened (v4)
 - iii. They perform their deeds to be applauded by people (v5-7)
- The disciples' countercultural community must let go of vain prestigious titles (v8-10) and instead seek to serve others, mindful of the reckoning and reward to come (v11-12).
- The explicit contrast of Jesus's norms for his disciples with the practices of the leaders in these verses provides a key for interpreting the seven 'woes' of v13-36.

v1-3

- The various religious leaders with whom Jesus has been in conflict with since 21:12 are now absent, and Jesus speaks to his disciples and the crowds.
- The chair or seat of Moses may be a metaphor, or refer to an actual seat in the synagogue where authoritative teaching occurred. Either way, occupying this 'chair' signified the ongoing exercise of authority that began at Sinai with Moses.
- The fact that Jesus counsels his disciples to obey their teachings, despite all the conflict with them, is surprising. Some commentators say Jesus is being ironic, or sarcastic, and downplay Jesus's instruction. However, Jesus says their teaching must be followed in principle (not in specifics, as will be seen in v4) because of their authoritative position as teachers.

v4

- Jesus's imagery of heavy burdens being loaded speaks of the Pharasaic traditions, not the commands of the Torah. Their burdens contrast with the light load of Jesus in 11:30.
- In view of Matt 5:20, the point of Jesus's metaphor is not to contrast the hardness of the Pharisees' rules with the easiness of Jesus's teachings. Rather, Jesus contrasts the Pharisees preoccupation with trivial matters with their neglect of the central internal virtues that enable and animate obedience to the Torah (23:23, 5:21-22, 27-28, 9:13, 12:7, 15:1-20).
- In addition, the Pharisees refuse to help people keep their own rules!

v5-7

- Here Jesus exposes the primary motivation of the Pharisees, and that is to maintain & enjoy their elevated status in society. They do it “*in order to be seen by others*”.
 - They are living examples of what Jesus taught NOT to do in the Sermon on the Mount! (Matt 6:18, referring to giving, prayer & fasting)
- The general statement in v5 is illustrated in the remaining verses by six examples, arranged in 3 pairs.
- Phylacteries and tassels were ways of publicly displaying one's piety.
 - Phylacteries (or 'tefillin') were small leather boxes containing Torah portions that men wore on the arm and forehead, on the basis of a literal understanding of Ex 13:9, 16.
 - Tassels were fringes on robes, or prayer shawls.
- Other examples used by Jesus include seeking prominent places at public functions, and a preoccupation with public greetings.
 - 'Rabbi' was a respectful greeting that literally meant 'my master'.
 - Only after 70 CE (and the destruction of Jerusalem) did the word come to be used to describe someone who occupied an ordained position of religious leadership.

v8-10

- Jesus now turns from denouncing the leaders' *false* piety to commanding *true* piety from his disciples.
- Jesus forbids them from using the lofty titles of either 'rabbi', 'father' or 'teacher/instructor', as no human being is worthy of such honour! Rather, these titles should be reserved for the heavenly Father and Jesus the Messiah.
- Essentially, Jesus's disciples form an 'egalitarian' family whose members view each other simply as brother or sister, despite the different roles they play in the community (eg Peter as leader).

v11-12

- Here the contrast of Jesus's kingdom is reinforced in words that remind us of Matt 20:25-28 (as well as 18:4). True greatness pertains to service, not title.
- Those that seek to exalt themselves, like the religious leaders, will be humbled. But those who seek to humble themselves and serve others, like Jesus's disciples, will be exalted.
 - The disciples will indeed be exalted, after much humiliation, as seen in Matt 19:28.

b) Denouncing the Pharisees (23:13-36)

Background to 'woe oracles'

- Jesus's final and great denunciation of the religious leaders must be seen against the background of the biblical prophets, who frequently cried woe against Israel's sins (eg the six woes in Isaiah 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22)¹ His woe oracles are thus not something new!
- In addition, heated rhetoric in the service of religious disputes was the norm in ancient times, and such rhetoric had been used in Jewish circles from the days of the biblical prophets, continuing into the Second Temple period.
- These oracles blend grief, anger and alarm about the consequences that will come upon Israel due to its sin.
- Prophets are angry because they are speaking for God against sin, but prophets are also stricken with grief because the anger is directed against their own people. Prophets are this 'caught between', hence the emotionally charged content.
- The form of such oracles includes an initial pronouncement of woe, followed by a description of the people upon whom the woe will come. This functions as a reason for the woe.²
- As is clear from 23:37, Jesus's woe oracles are not merely an exercise of spite against his opponents. His words come at least as much from grief as from anger.

Structure of the 'woe oracles'

- The seven woes³ of v13-36 are best understood as three pairs followed by a climactic concluding woe:
 - First pair: Entering the kingdom
 - The leaders prevent access to God (v13)
 - The leaders make proselytes for Gehenna (v15)
 - Second pair: Matters of the Law
 - The leaders mislead people concerning oaths (v16-22)
 - The leaders neglect the weightier matters of the Torah (v23-24)
 - Third pair: Internal & External righteousness
 - The leaders clean only the outside of the cup (v25-26)
 - The leaders are like whitewashed tombs (v27-28)
 - The climactic conclusion
 - The leaders culminate a history of rejecting the prophets (v29-36)

¹ Also Amos 5:18, 6:1, 4, Hab 2:6, 9, 12, 10 (a series of 5 woes), Zech 11:17. In intertestamental times woe oracles were prolific.

² The structure of a 'woe' is the same as a 'beatitude' (Matt 5:3-12), although opposite in content.

³ v14 is omitted (a potential eighth woe) from modern translations, as it is unlikely to be part of the original text of Matthew.

v13 **The first woe**

- The charge against the leaders is severe: not only do they not enter the kingdom, but prevent others from entering too!
 - Ironically they “are not leaders but misleaders” (Davies & Allison).
- Jeremiah 23:1-8 is likely in the background of this text, denouncing shepherds who feed themselves, but scatter the flock⁴. Likely also is Ezekiel 34:1-10, which compares the leaders of Israel to shepherds who feed themselves, but scatter & devour the flock.
- Hypocrisy is mentioned fourteen times in Matthew, half of those here in the woe oracles (also 6:2, 5, 16, 7:5, 15:7, 22:18, 24:51). The various Greek words in the ‘hypocrite’ word group do not have a negative connotation in their original secular setting, often describing an actor or someone who mimics another. Jesus of course employs the word in judging the religious leaders, focusing on the fact that actors essentially ‘pretend’ to be something they are not. In Matthew, hypocrites are those who have an outward appearance of religious devotion, but whose hearts are in fact far from God. Their lives are ultimately a pretence. They maintain external religious appearances primarily to receive human applause (as in 6:2, 5, 16).

v15 **The second woe**

- The leaders efforts to convert others likely refers to Pharisees urging ‘God fearing’ Gentiles (eg Cornelius in Acts 10:2, 22) to become full converts to Judaism and observe there Pharisaic traditions.
- Ultimately, the supposed ‘shepherds’ of God’s people, who should be leading people into the kingdom of God, are not themselves entering, and thus misleading (ie preventing) others from entering.
- Their actions thus lead to people becoming children of Gehenna, instead of the kingdom. They do more harm than good.

v16-22 **The third woe**

- This third woe, regarding oaths, is the most extensively developed of the seven oracles.
- The Pharisees’ deployment of oaths is evidence of casuistry. Casuistry is the employment of overly subtle reasoning, especially in questions of morality, with the motivation to resolve moral dissonance. In the Pharisees’ case they are exploiting tiny and dubious loopholes in the application of oaths, making distinctions between the temple and gold in it, and the altar and what is on it. It is clear that in oaths there is no valid distinction between the altar and what is offered on it, neither is there a difference between the temple and the one who dwells in it. Finally, there is no difference between heaven, the throne of God, and God who sits on it, since the articles themselves represent God.
- Ultimately, Jesus has flatly denied the need for any oaths (5:33-37). Integrity demands that one does what one says one will do.

⁴ A ‘woe’ oracle itself.

v23-24 **The fourth woe**

- The Pharisees are not condemned for tithing herbs (which would be viewed as a crop, Lev 27:30), but for tithing herbs without attending to the law's weightier matters, like justice, mercy and faithfulness⁵.
- This does not create a hierarchical ethic, but instead focuses on central values that support specific legal obligations. The 'great commandment' in Matt 22:34-40 is an example of this principle.
- Another example is Hosea 6:6, which has a similar formulation, where the offering of sacrifices should not be seen as replacing the need for love of God, but rather an expression of it. Jesus had previously quoted this text in 9:13, where he suggested that religious ritual should not replace social justice. Often, it seems, religious ritual replaced the need for human compassion.
- The hyperbolic expressions of straining out gnats and avoiding swallowing cameras could subtly imply the leaders' inconsistency, since both Gants and camels were considered unclean and therefore not to be eaten!

v25-26 **The fifth woe**

- The fifth and sixth woes together address the Pharisees' neglect of internal matters. Despite their zeal for the Torah they are characterised by greed and self-indulgence.
- Jesus is likely not criticising their strict external habits per se, but rather their neglect of internal righteousness.

v27-28 **The sixth woe**

- Jesus continues the theme of internal righteousness, here switching the metaphor to that of a tomb, which would have been beautifully decorated on the outside, but with a corpse on the inside. According to Pharisaic tradition bones and decaying corpses were ritually impure.
- The charge of lawlessness here is critical, as the Pharisees would have prided themselves on being law-keepers, but for Jesus, obedience to the law must emanate from the heart.
- This was the heart of Jesus' important pronouncement in 5:20 (and the corresponding 5:48) about disciples' righteousness exceeding that of the Pharisees, something which is emphasised through the six following examples in 5:21-48.

v29-33 **The seventh woe**

- The simile of the tombs links the sixth and seventh woe.
- Here the tombs are of the prophets murdered by the leaders' ancestors. The leaders beautify the tombs and claim they would have had no part in killing the prophets like their ancestors.
- However, Jesus shows in v31&32 that their actions in rejecting him, and in planning (and later executing) his death tie them exactly to their ancestors.
- '*Fill up the measure of your fathers*' indicates the climactic final rejection of God's greatest prophet, his son. Jesus's impending crucifixion then is the culmination of Israel's historical pattern of rejecting its own prophets.
- The words in v31 & 32 also importantly point to the root of the problems already addresses: if Israel had listened to the prophets, it would not have had to face the consequences announced by the prophets.
- The epithet in v33 recalls 3:7 (from John the Baptist) and 12:34.

⁵ Micah 6:8 also has these three values as central.

v34-36

- In this section Jesus predicts that the rejection of prophets won't stop with his own impending death, and that his disciples will be similarly rejected.
- The murder of Jesus will bring horrible judgment not only because it is the rejection of God's son, but also because it is the ultimate atrocity in an atrocious sequence that began when Cain murdered his brother Abel.
- Abel (Gen 4:8-16) and Zechariah (2 Chron 24:21) were the first and last martyrs of the Hebrew Bible, which ends not with Malachi but with 2 Chronicles⁶.

c) Jesus's Lament over Jerusalem (23:37-39)

- This tender lament is a remarkable and surprising conclusion to the intense denunciation prior. Jesus's compassion is evident, he is clearly deeply moved for his people and his city despite the ongoing opposition of its leaders and the sufferings that lie ahead.
- Christians today should ponder their own attitude & concern towards the Jews, emulating the concern of Jesus himself. An arrogant or disinterested posture towards non-Christians is always inappropriate, but it is especially despicable when it concerns the Jewish people (see Rom 10:1. 11:16-24).
- Related to the above is the tragic historical Christian anti-semitism, which has sometimes been propped up by the woe oracles here. It is important to note, and see clearly, that Jesus's rhetoric here is against the religious leaders, and is thus an intra-mural dispute, not a 'Christian rebuke of the Jews'. This is in no way an attack on the Jews as a people at that time, let alone for all time.

v37

- These words are the climax of Jesus's public ministry to Israel.
- The final public words of Jesus articulate unspeakable sadness at their refusal to respond to his words and deeds.
- There is a glimmer of hope for salvation if only Israel will acknowledge Jesus to be its Messiah.

⁶ The reference to Zechariah son of Barachiah causes some problems in identification, as the martyred Zechariah of 2 Chron is the son of Jehoida. Some have suggested Matthew has conflated the pre & post-exilic Zechariahs (2 Chron 24:20, Zech 1:1) for his literary and theological purposes. This could also simply be a transmission issue, as some manuscripts omit the paternal reference. Arguments for retaining the martyred Zechariah include the fact that his account was a subject of later rabbinic literature, and his murder was a particularly notable sin, especially in the fact that the victim implored God's retribution. Matthew recounting this episode therefore further justified the judgment against the leaders. Post-exilic Zechariah (son of Berechiah) is notable in his message of warning about covenant renewal in preparation for renewed temple worship, as well as the notable theme of Messianic hope.

v38-39

- 'Your house' most likely refers to the temple, as the temple, along with the city, represent the life and destiny of the entire nation. The nation will experience desolation due to its rejection of Jesus.
- Israel has sinned in rejecting Jesus, and there will be punishment for that sin. But here, as in the rest of the Bible, repentance after sin and judgment brings grace and redemption. Jesus will return only when Israel in true repentance utters the words that were uttered without adequate understanding in Matt 21:9.
- When Israel does bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord, ie recognises Jesus as messiah, they will receive the eschatological blessings they have previously rejected.

A) Discourse 5: Judgment of Jerusalem and the Coming of Christ (24:1-26:2)

- This is the fifth and final discourse of Jesus in Matthew, often called the 'Olivet Discourse' because of the setting (v3).
- It is sometimes called the 'Eschatological Discourse' because of the subject matter of the Discourse, which includes predictions of 'last things'. However, the Discourse also provides warnings about events that would take place in the disciples' future, but still within their relative lifetimes (like the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70).
- The fact that the Discourse includes prediction of events both near and far is connected to the disciples' dual question about "*when will these things be?*" (i.e. the destruction of the temple v3a) and "*what will be the sign of your coming at the end of the age?*" (i.e. the second coming of Jesus v3b).
- This dual-question, and dual-answer by Jesus, is an important detail of this Discourse, as it helps us make decide between the various interpretive options historically taken on this Discourse.
- The two opposite views taken are the 'Preterist' and 'Futurist' approaches.
- In the 'Preterist' (from the Latin 'preter', meaning 'past') view, all of the events described by Jesus in this discourse have taken place in our past, most of them in the events surrounding the Roman destruction of AD70⁷.
- In the opposite 'Futurist' view, all of the events mentioned in this discourse are yet to take place in the future with the second coming of Christ.
- Neither of these approaches take into account the dual-question of the disciples concerning the destruction of the temple, and the end of the world, both views conflating them into a single event. A valid approach must take both an historical and future view (from our time perspective).

⁷ 'Partial Preterists' see 24:1-35 as having happened in the past, with 24:36-25:46 referring to the coming of Jesus.

- One such approach is the combination 'preterist-futurist' view, which does not simply divide the discourse into 'past' and 'future' events (as in Partial-Preterism), but sees within it the more complex idea of significant historical events (like AD70) as being anticipatory fulfillments of yet-future events (events consummated at Christ's second coming). In essence, more than one event is referred to in the prophetic prediction.
- This 'typological' approach has also been called 'multiple- or dual-fulfillment', 'near-and-far fulfillment', and 'foreshortening' or 'foreshadowing'⁸.
- This approach to Biblical Prophecy is something we learned to deal with when studying Daniel, where (for example) events surrounding the person of Antiochus IV Epiphanes were predicted in Daniel 8, 9, 11&12, events which occurred historically in 175-164 BC, but which also served as an example of the kinds of actions the yet-future Antichrist would perform.
- This example is especially relevant to the Olivet Discourse, where the '*abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel*' is specifically referenced by Jesus (24:15)⁹, referring to predictions in Daniel of the actions of Antiochus in 167 BC (predicted in Dan 8:13, 9:27, 11:31 & 12:11), events which will be replicated/consummated/fulfilled with the antichrist prior to the 'great tribulation'¹⁰.
- Using this approach, one can see that it is likely Jesus mentions events that would actually happen in AD70 (like the destruction of the temple), but would also typify yet-future events in the land of Israel prior to the second-coming of Jesus and the end of the world¹¹.
- It is interesting to note the leanings of the various Gospel writers towards near or far events in their individual accounts of the Olivet Discourse. Luke's version seems to have the near events of AD70 more in focus (see Luke 21:20-24, especially v24), whereas Matthew arguably (certainly in my opinion) has the end-times events more in focus (compare Luke 21:7 with Matthew 24:3). Mark has neither near nor far more in focus¹².

⁸ Technically speaking, there is a difference between dual-fulfillment and typology. Dual-fulfillment sees an intentional reference to two events, whereas typology sees one event predicted, but one that is intentionally typical of a later event. I would see dual-elements of this prophecy as typological, not dual-fulfillment, as the emphasis on yet-future events. However, it is simplest to see these approaches as both referring to events near & far at the same time.

⁹ Not to mention Jesus's favourite self-designation of 'Son of Man' - here in 24:27, 30 (x2), 37, 29, 44, 25;31 - originating from Daniel 7!

¹⁰ To be clear, 8:13 is typological (Antiochus mainly in view), 9:27 is futurist (antichrist in view), 11:31 is typological, 12:11 is futurist,

¹¹ In this way, Jesus is functioning as a prophet in the mould of Daniel (and Isaiah and others), with similar prophetic patterning.

¹² This would make sense if Mark was the primary source material for Matthew & Luke.

- Note also, as seen in the table below, that Matthew's version is much longer than both Mark or Luke.

Content	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1. Setting	24:1-3	13:1-4	21:5-7
2. Beginning of birth pains	24:4-14	13:5-13	21:8-19
3. Abomination of desolation	24:15-28	13:14-23	21:20-24
4. Coming of the Son of Man	24:29-31	13:24-27	21:25-27
5. Lesson of the fig tree	24:32-41	13:28-32	21:28-33
6. Necessity of alertness	24:42-44	13:33-37	21:34-36
7. Parable of the servant	24:45-51		
8. Parable of ten virgins	25:1-13		
9. Parable of the talents	25:14-30		
10. Judgment of the nations	25:31-46		

- It has been said that the purpose of this Discourse is not as much to stress chronology, but rather ethics, based on the amount of time spent on the two related topics. While it is true that Matthew extends the exhortation of alertness & faithfulness with three parables (not found in Mark & Luke), the weight of material is still roughly equal:
 - Description of events ('what?'): Matt 24:1-35
 - Exhortation of ethics ('so what?'): Matt 24:36-25:30
 - Both: Matt 25:31-46
- We should not minimise the eschatological teachings of Jesus here, as indeed it is his most sustained teaching on the matter¹³. However, neither should we be so caught up in timing & event details that we miss our responsibility during the time of waiting. It is true that whilst the disciples are concerned about when Jesus will renew his presence with them, Jesus is more concerned about how they will live in his absence.
- This accords with Biblical prophecy in general, which is never mere prediction of future events. The knowledge of what God will do in the future must have a profound effect upon God's people in the present.

¹³ Eschatology appears in each of Jesus's first four discourses, especially at or near their conclusions (7:22, 10:32, 39-42, 13:49, 18:35, and so it is not surprising that Jesus ends *all* his teaching (26:1 "When Jesus had finished *all* these sayings") in Matthew with Eschatology!

- The outline of the discourse is as follows:
 1. Narrative Introduction (24:1-3)
 2. The Discourse Proper (24:4-25:46)
 - a) **Exposition: what will happen (24:4-35)**
 - i. The Beginning of Birth Pains (24:4-14)
 - ii. The Abomination of Desolation (24:15-28)
 - iii. The Coming of the Son of Man (24:29-31)
 - iv. Parable of the Fig Tree (24:32-35)
 - b) **An Exhortation to alertness (24:36-25:30)**
 - i. Comparison to the Days of Noah (24:36-42)
 - ii. Parable of the Thief (24:43-44)
 - iii. The Faithful and the Evil slave (24:45-51)
 - iv. Parable of the Wise and the Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)
 - v. Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)
 - c) **The Final Judgment (25:31-46)**

1. Narrative introduction (24:1-3)

v1-2

- Jesus has just announced the desolation of the temple (23:38), reflected now in his departure from it.
- The disciples surprisingly comment on the impressive temple buildings (perhaps linking to Jesus's comments on its desolation?), to which Jesus predicts, emphatically, that it will be thoroughly destroyed.

v3

- The disciples cross the Kidron valley and approach the Mount of Olives, from which one would have a clear view of the temple.
- The disciples ask their two-part question, first concerning the timing of the temple destruction (to which Jesus had just commented), and second the timing of his second coming precipitating the end of the age.
- What is striking is that it seems like the disciples have finally grasped the fact that Jesus will depart (something they have historically been unable to comprehend), as well as understood his teaching about his return as final judge, precipitating the end of the age¹⁴.

¹⁴ Some see the disciples' reference to 'coming' as the unequivocal unveiling of his messianic status, but I think they are simply referring to his return.

2. The Discourse Proper (24:4-25:46)

a) Exposition: What will Happen (24:4-35)

- Jesus's responds to the disciples first in general terms about events that will likely characterise the entire period before his coming (the 'beginning of birth pains' v4-14).
- He then describes an unprecedented season of intense tribulation that will immediately precede his coming (the 'abomination of desolation' v15-28).
- Finally Jesus describes the events surrounding his actual arrival with familiar biblical apocalyptic imagery ('The coming of the Son of Man' v29-31).

i. **General: The Beginning of Birth pains (24:4-14)**

- The disciples want to know what sign will announce the coming end of the age, that is, their question is one of timing. But Jesus does not answer in a precise way, instead mentioning several matters -false messiahs, wars, famines etc- all of which generally refer to events in the entire period before his coming, so as not to be of use in calculating his arrival.
- Indeed the metaphor of '*the beginning of birth pains*' indicates that such events (as we experience them even now!) are in fact signs indicating his coming is *not* immanent, but rather still part of the extended time of 'labor' before the end comes.
- Ultimately, there will be enough time before the end for the kingdom message to be preached throughout the world (24:14).
- These events in v1-14 therefore all characterise the entire duration of time between Christ's departure and return.

v4-5 **Deceptive, False Messiahs**

- Jesus's answer to the disciples' question begins with a warning against the deception by false messiahs (see also 2 Thess 2:3, 1 John 2:26, 2 John 7).
- The warning is repeated and expanded in 24:23-27, applied specifically to the events surrounding the actions of the antichrist¹⁵. This particular period will experience an intensity of this deception, but disciples at all times should be alert to false-messianic and false-prophetic deception.

v6-8 **War, Famine, and Earthquakes**

- International and geological disturbances will also characterise this period. Disciples are encouraged that God is sovereign over them, and thus they should not be frightened.
- In addition, they do not signify the end, they are merely the first stages of the messianic woes to come on the world.

¹⁵ Perhaps also typically in the near events of AD70

v9-12 Persecution and Apostasy

- The deception and upheavals will be accompanied by persecution, something disciples already expect based on Jesus's earlier teachings in 5:10-12 and the missionary discourse (10:17-23, 32-38).
- Disciples will be universally hated because of their identification with Jesus, a persecution that will even result in murder.
- This external pressure will have devastating consequences within the community of the disciples, where some will fall away from their commitment to Jesus and will hate and betray their previous fellows.
- False prophets will promote the coming false messiahs (again something which will intensify at the time preceding Jesus's immanent return), which itself will result in a corresponding decline in the central virtue of discipleship: love.
- Loving God and neighbor is the quintessence of the law and the prophets (22:34-40) and so its decline amounts to lawlessness that devastates God's people.

v13-14 Perseverance and Mission

- The response of disciples to these difficult circumstances is persevering fidelity.
- The salvation promised to those who endure is not merely relief from persecution, but future salvific reward for obedience, contrasting those who fall away (v10-12).
- Matthew 24:13 is a verbatim echo of 10:22.
- The fruit of such perseverance is that the kingdom message will be preached to 'all the nations'.

ii. Future-Specific: The Abomination of Desolation & End Times (24:15-28)

- V15 carries on the subject matter at the end of v14, that is 'the end will come'
- Thus v15-31 details events surround the coming of the end.
- The familiar general warnings about persecution & false prophecy intensify in this period, leading to a time of unprecedented difficulty (see Daniel 12:1).
- There is much to learn about future events in this passage, but perhaps one of the greater questions is not chronological but existential. As Turner writes:
 - 'The various preterist and futurist views plausibly address the historical referents of the prophecy. But disciples need wisdom as they ponder a divine providence that allows the elect to suffer but limits their suffering so that they are not spiritually ruined. Suffering is a way of life for Jesus's disciples during the present age (5:10; 10:16-42; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12), and it will evidently intensify as this age ends. Yet in God's wisdom such suffering accomplishes God's goals, not the persecutors' goals (cf. Gen. 50:20; Acts 4:27-28; Rom. 8:28-39). Although Jesus's disciples may never fully grasp why their suffering is necessary, the example of Jesus assures them that God will enable them to endure it and eventually to reign with Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11; 10:24-33; 19:28-29; Rom. 8:18; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Tim. 2:12; 2 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 2:26-28; 3:21-22; 5:10; 20:4)'

v15

- The '*abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel*' is a very direct, and very specific reference to prophetic material in Dan 8:13, 9:27, 11:31, 12:11.
- This confirms that Jesus is now 'zooming in' on 'the end' (v14), giving more detailed information about events surrounding his second coming, which was ultimately the subject of Daniel's prophecies.
- Thus v15-31 primarily refers to events at the end of the world, but some typological similarities will be evident in the more immanent destruction of the temple.
- As mentioned earlier, Daniel's prophecies on this 'desolating sacrilege' event alternate between the more immanent actions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 BC (8:13, 11:31), which are used typologically to indicate the more future actions of the antichrist, and predictions referring to the future antichrist directly (9:27, 12:11).
- Jesus thus likely employs a similar prophetic approach, where the near events of AD70 and the actions of Titus are typical of the future fulfillment and the actions of the antichrist¹⁶.
- The fact that the yet-future antichrist event is primarily in view is seen in Jesus's reference to the '*abomination of desolation*' triggering the unprecedented '*great tribulation*' (v21).

v16-20

- The instruction to flee to the Judean hill country indicates a siege of Jerusalem is envisioned.
- According to Eusebius, before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD, the Jerusalem Christians fled to Pella, East of the Jordan river and were preserved from harm.
- Again, this likely typifies a similar evacuation in the future siege of Jerusalem prior to Jesus's return, something Daniel 11:41 similarly predicted, with Edom and Moab being in the same region East of the Jordan.
- Jesus details the sudden and urgent flight needed due to the sudden threat, something even more burdensome for the pregnant or nursing mothers.

v21-22

- The unprecedented severity of these times is the reason for the urgent warnings of the preceding verses. Unlike previous 'generic' troubles that did not augur the end (24:6), this degree of anguish would signify the end of the present world.
- The unique severity of these events ("*such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be*") makes the preterist view hard to reconcile with the events of AD70.
- However, God's concern for his elect will result in these horrible times being abbreviated.

v23-25

- Although false messiahs and false prophets will appear throughout history (24:4-5, 11), their activity will be especially intense near the end.
- Jesus's reticence to use miracles to gain a following (4:1-11, 12:15-21, 39, 16:1-4) contrasts with the false messiahs' practice.

¹⁶ The Roman standard, honouring pagan gods, being paraded in the temple prior to its destruction could be a typological 'desolating sacrilege'

v26-28

- v26 repeats the gist of v23, and reiterates the warning against believing the false prophets.
- The disciples must not believe claims that the Messiah is in some obscure place, such as the desert or an inner room. In contrast, Jesus's appearance will be as unmistakably clear as lighting that flashes across the sky from east to west (see also 1Thess 4:15-16, Zech 9:14). This will leave no doubt about the identity of the Messiah.
- The meaning of the saying in v28 is difficult to reconcile, but likely is a grisly picture speaking of a final eschatological battle (see Rev 16:12-16 & 19:17-21).

iii. Future-Specific: The Coming of the Son of Man (24:29-31)

- These verses describe the climactic signs in heaven that immediately precede Jesus's future coming (v29). They also describe the glorious coming itself, followed by the immediate event of the gathering and restoration of the elect (v30-31).
- This appearance effects a reversal of business as usual. Disciples, who have suffered much, are now relieved of their suffering and with joy are reunited to their master, while their persecutors suffer punishment (see also 2 Thess 1:5-10).
- The global language employed here (and elsewhere in the discourse) makes it very unlikely that it was fulfilled by a local event in AD70 (as in the Preterist view).
- The passage is filled with biblical eschatological imagery, as shown in the table below.
- The crucial text is Dan. 7, where God is pictured as an awesome judge, "the Ancient of Days" (Dan. 7:9), who passes sentence in favour of the Son of Man, giving universal dominion to him and to his people (7:14, 22, 27). The context is eschatological reversal, in which the "little horn" (7:8, 20, 24-25), the archenemy of God and Israel, is judged and defeated. In both Dan. 7 and Matt. 24, the coming of the Son of Man ends the persecution of God's people and begins their glorious rule with Jesus.

Matthew	Topic	Hebrew Bible
24:29a	Tribulation	Dan. 12:1
24:29b	Sun and moon darkened	Isa. 13:10; 24:23; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zeph. 1:15
24:29c	Stars fallen, shaken	Isa. 34:4; Hag. 2:6
24:30a, 30c	Son of Man coming on the clouds in glory and power	Jer. 4:13; Dan. 7:13-14
24:30b	Tribes mourn	Zech. 12:10-13:1
24:31a	Trumpet	Isa. 27:13
24:31b	Elect gathered	Isa 11:11-16, Isa 27:12-13, Isa 66:18-19, Zech 10:8-10
24:31c	Four winds	Dan. 7:2; Zech. 2:6

v29

- The cosmic upheaval here has Hebrew Bible imagery, but is also repeated in NT passages such as Rev 6:12-13 & Rev 8:12.
- The prophecies of Isaiah (esp. 13:9-10) & Joel (esp. 3:15) are particularly relevant here, as well as relevant to 25:31-46.
- The cosmic chaos portrayed here hints at the need for cosmic renewal (see Matt 19:28), which is about to occur!

v30

- '*The sign of the Son of Man*' may mean that the coming itself is the sign (thus answering the disciples' question about signs, with the Son of Man's arrival the principle sign ie 'the sign that is the Son of Man coming'), or that there will appear with Jesus another entity indicating his arrival ('that which signifies the Son of Man coming' - see Jer 4:21 & 51:27).
- In keeping with the Hebrew Bible prophetic background, it is important to note Zech 12:10-13:1 here, which speaks of the tribes of Israel repenting & believing in Jesus the Messiah, leading to their restoration¹⁷.
- Their rejection of Jesus, leading to the judgment of the great tribulation (just as the first rejection led to the destruction in AD70), will result in the grieving of repentance, followed by restoration, and the fulfillment of God's covenants with his people.

v31

- The Son of Man comes to gather his elect (in this context the diaspora of Israel, scattered by the persecution of the great tribulation), whom he has preserved through severe anguish.
- God's elect are from all nations, as seen in the description that they are gathered "from the four winds" (see Zech 2:6).

¹⁷ 'tribes of the *earth*' (ESV) can also be translated 'tribes of the *land*'. Jesus's words are identical to the LXX of Zech 12:12.

iv. A Concluding Parable - The Fig Tree (24:32-35)

- This passage parabolically expresses both the nearness of Jesus's coming, as well as affirms its certainty.
- While the date of Jesus's future coming is unknowable (24:36), Jesus's disciples (then and now!) dare not assume that it is in the distant future. Rather they must alertly expect Jesus to come at any time, and serve him faithfully until they see him (24:36-25:30).

v32-34

- "*All these things*" refers to the preliminary signs that anticipate Jesus's coming, not the coming itself. This is clear from the immediate context, which has Jesus at the gate when the signs are displayed. It also clearly answers the question of the disciples about the signs that would indicate Jesus's coming is immanent.
- This is important because it helps explain v34, which has Jesus expressing certainty that "*This generation*" will see "*all these things*". This does not mean Jesus's contemporaries will see his return, but will see these signs take place.
- While the disciples would not see the ultimate eschatological signs preceding the end of the world, they would see the signs of the 'type', that is the destruction in AD70.
- During this time many of the signs expressed by Jesus were experienced by his contemporaries (wars, persecution, false prophets, lawlessness, desolation of the temple), even reports of strange cosmic phenomena during those days (as reported by Josephus)!
- Note: a simpler (and plausible) explanation of "*...this generation will not pass away until all these things take place*" could be that 'this generation' does not refer to Jesus's 12 disciples, but the generation of believers present when the tribulation events take place¹⁸. As Vlach explains:
 - 'No one knows when this period of tribulation that culminates in the coming of Jesus will take place, but when it does the generation who sees these events can grasp they are the ones who will see the coming of Jesus'

v35

- As ultimate teacher of the Torah Jesus's words are on par with the Torah itself. His words are equivalent to the words of God, as eternal and authoritative as God himself (Isa 40:8, Ps 119:89).

¹⁸ The difficulty here is the fact that Matthew's use of 'this generation' has previously always referred to contemporaries of Jesus. Still, that does not rule out future 'contemporaries' as in disciples.

b) An Exhortation to Alertness (24:36-25:46)

- From now on in the discourse (until the climactic conclusion with the judgment scene in 25:31-46) Jesus's goal is not to provide additional information on the signs and timing of his Second coming, but to exhort them with the proper response to the certainty of his coming.
- This may not be what the disciples *want* to know, but it is what they *need* to know!
- He has already alluded to the fact that disciples must live as though his coming is immanent, and thus be alert, but this will be more fully emphasised in the teachings to follow in the discourse.
- This happens firstly with an example from Biblical history (the time of Noah 24:36-42), followed by three parables drawn from scenes from contemporary life, a house owner (24:43-44), servants in a household (24:45-51) & bridesmaids preparing for a wedding (25:1-13).
- However, alertness is not the only requirement of disciples. So too is faithfulness & dependable stewardship, outlined in the longest parable in this section, and indeed Jesus's last parable, the parable of the talents (25:14-30).
- It can be argued that Jesus's additionally stresses the requirement of compassion in the concluding teaching on the final judgment, but this has a very specific context, as we will see.

i. **Comparison to the Days of Noah (24:36-42)**

v36-37

- Jesus starts by emphasising the fact that the timing of his coming is unknowable, and even he, the Son, does not know when it will occur¹⁹.
- People living in the days preceding Jesus's coming will be as unaware of it as Noah's contemporaries were of the flood. In both instances, God's judgment is totally unanticipated!

v38-39

- In Noah's days people were preoccupied with daily matters and thus ignored the preaching of Noah (2 Pet 2:5), and were oblivious to the impending flood. At that point concern for such matters as food and marriage became pathetically superfluous!

v40-41

- The Imagery of one being 'taken' and one 'left' has been used to justify a pre-tribulation rapture theory, but it is unlikely that Jesus has this particular dispensation in mind.
- The connection with the preceding passage about Noah's flood, where those 'taken' were those washed away in the flood (ie judged) and those 'left' would be those rescued in the ark, probably speaks more to the swift judgment that occurs, at a time no-one is expecting.

¹⁹ This has created such a theological difficulty (regarding the trinity) that early textual edits removed 'nor the Son'!

ii. Parable of the Thief (24:43-44)

v43-44

- The necessity of alertness is further illustrated with this story.
- The owner of the house has not been warned about the burglary and thus cannot prevent it. Jesus's disciples do not know *when* he will come, but they do know *that* he will come, and they must be ready to meet him.

iii. The Faithful and the Evil slave (24:45-51)

v45-47

- This parable continues with the theme of Jesus's return being unexpected, but here it is the unexpected return of a master who has put a slave in charge of his household during his time away.
- A first slave is found faithfully serving the master when he returns and is rewarded, while a second slave assumes his master will be delayed a long time, and live selfishly and wickedly. Upon the surprise return of the master he is severely punished.
- The blessing given to the faithful servant is essentially a promotion, with greater degree of responsibility in the household. This accords with eschatological blessings given to faithful disciples taught earlier in Matthew (Matt 16:27, 19:28-29) as well as a reinforcing teaching to come next (25:21, 23, 29, 34).
- In this parable Jesus may have religious leaders in mind (especially with the judgment of 'hypocrite' v51), but likely it sets up one of the parables to come, which indicate the need for faithful service in the kingdom until the return of Christ.

v48-51

- Banishment with the hypocrites alludes to the most heinous sin in Matthew (Matt 6:2, 5, 16, 7:5 etc).

iv. Parable of the Wise and the Foolish Virgins (25:1-13)

- This parable reminds us, for the last time in this discourse, that the time of Jesus's coming is unknowable, but the emphasis here is that disciples should be ready for his arrival, no matter when he comes.
- This particular parable has suffered from over-extended allegorising in the church, and while it is true that there is much symbolic use of oil, lamps and weddings, in this parable Jesus only supplies one generalised conclusion, about alertness, indicating the primary point of the parable. Some of the allegories extracted from this parable divert attention from this main point.

v1

- This parable opens with the characteristic formula “the kingdom of heaven is like..”. The wedding metaphor continues from a scene in the illustration of Noah.
- Virgins are young unmarried women who attend the bride, and one should be careful not to read modern customs into this text.
- The betrothal contract, or ‘ketubah’, would already have been executed, and so it remains for the attendants to meet the groom when he takes the bride to the wedding celebration that begins life together.
- In the context of the Olivet discourse it is certainly likely that the eschatological wedding feast is in mind, with Jesus as the groom (see also Matt 8:11, 9:14-17, 22:1-4, Rev 19:6-9)²⁰.
- The number 10 is significant in scripture, often indicating a full complement (eg Gen 18:20, 45:23 etc).

v2-5

- The wise virgins are the ones who expect a delay, and are prepared for it, while the foolish expect the groom to arrive soon, and are unprepared when there is a delay.
- This may seem to contradict the emphasis on alertness (ie preparing for an immanent arrival of Jesus), and indeed in this parable there is a switch with the evil servant who expected a delay in the previous parable (24:48). But the focus in this parable (as with the previous) is on the readiness required for the arrival of Jesus, accepting that one will not know when he will arrive, whether sooner or later!

v6-10a

- At midnight (or some point in the middle of the night) a shout announces the groom’s immanent arrival. The focus on the time of night is to emphasise the degree of watchfulness required (not falling asleep!), as well as the surprising time of arrival (see also 1 Thess 5:2 ‘a thief in the night’).
- The foolish virgins were inadequately prepared and need to leave to buy more oil, and while they are away the groom arrives.

v10b-12

- The wedding feast begins, probably after a procession to the groom’s house. The door is locked, blocking admission of the foolish virgins.
- Their appeal to the groom, and his refusal to permit entry, ominously recalls the judgment scene of Matt 7:21-23.
- Noteworthy is their exclusionary treatment is similar to that experienced by the man without wedding clothes in 22:11-14.

v13

- The problem of the virgins was again due to the unknowability of Jesus’s arrival. They thought they knew the precise time, and prepared accordingly, but instead the groom’s arrival took longer than anticipated. Jesus will arrive on his own schedule (or, more precisely, on his Father’s schedule!), not on ours.
- Comparing this parable with the one before, in this one the foolish virgins underestimate the delay of Jesus, while in the one before the wicked slave overestimates his delay. Either way, estimates are unhelpful!
- Christians must constantly expect Jesus while they persevere in faith, obedience and missional service.

²⁰ Hebrew Bible imagery seen in Isa 54:4-6, 62:5, Jer 31:32, Ezek 16:7-22, Hos 2:16-19.

v. Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)

- The transition from emphasising alertness to readiness in the previous parable is now emphasised in the parable of the talents, which completely emphasised the responsibilities of disciples while they wait.
- The issue now is not whether servants will be surprised at the masters return, but whether they will be dependable in using his resources.
- This parable points out that faithfulness to Jesus during his absence leads to good stewardship one's opportunities and abilities.
- As Garland puts it: 'When Christ returns, he will not ask if one had the date right but 'what have you been doing?'
- A familiar saying is appropriate here: 'attempt great things for God, expect great things from God'²¹
- The structure of the parable is symmetrical, but with more time given to the fate of the wicked slave. Thus the parable, despite its positive elements, still functions as a warning, against irresponsibility among professed disciples.

v14-15

- The servants are entrusted with responsibilities according to their individual abilities. Even those with seemingly limited abilities or opportunities are still entrusted with great responsibility.
- A talent was originally measure of weight, not currency, varying between 20-30kg. This heavy weight indicates that the currency value is high, a very large sum is envisaged here. One talent might be as much as six thousand denarii, which would take a day labourer 19 years to earn! Five talents then, is a huge fortune.
- This hyperbole likely indicates the greatness of our discipleship responsibility in the kingdom, as well as the greatness of God's power given to help disciples achieve their tasks²².

v16-18

- Jesus describes the servants response to this responsibility, with two gaining 100% profit but one burying the money to preserve it.
- Just as Jesus gave no instructions on what to do with the talent, neither do we see what the servants did with it.

v19-23

- The master heartily rewards the two servants for their faithfulness and fruitfulness by assigning them even more responsibility.
- In addition, they are encouraged to enjoy the joy of the master, and likely 'enter in' alludes to the eschatological feast. The greatest joy of a follower of Jesus is to share in the joy of Jesus himself!
- It is noteworthy that both faithful servants receive the same reward, even though the first accomplished quantitatively more than the second. This shows that the characteristic of fidelity is regarded, not merely numerical success.

²¹ Initially attributed to William Carey

²² Not to mention the greatness of God's gifts to his people.

v24-27

- The wicked slave attempts to persuade the master that his caution is commendable, referring to the master's harshness and his own fear.
- Indeed the master does get angry with this servant, since he could have at least earned some interest by depositing the money in a bank.
- Hiding the master's talent in the ground is as senseless and useless as having a lamp without any oil for it.
- Inaction is never prudence, but more likely sloth.

v28-30

- From the first two slaves, one deduces that trustworthiness leads to even greater blessing, but the third slave demonstrates a lack of trustworthiness that leads to removal of original blessing.
- There is no excuse for inactivity, since it arises out of fear and/or sloth, neither of which are compatible with discipleship.
- Followers of Jesus have been equipped to serve him and are obligated to use their gifts to extend God's kingdom (Rom 12:6, 1 Cor 12:7, Eph 4:7, 1 Pet 4:10).
- God indeed will call disciples to account for the stewardship of their individual abilities and opportunities.

c) The Final Judgment (25:31-46)

- The final section of the Olivet discourse ends fittingly in a great judgment scene, with Jesus now concluding his eschatological prophecy, picking up from details surrounding his second coming in 24:29-31, 36.
- This last part of Jesus's last discourse has been described by Turner as 'perhaps the most profoundly difficult text in Matthew'.
- Problems surround its placement in eschatological schemes (is it referring to the 'once only' judgment, or one of a set of judgments?), the identities of those being judged (who are 'the nations', and who are 'my brothers'?) as well as the standard of their judgment, which plumbs the tricky depths of the relationship between faith & works.
- It has been noted that with all these complexities, there exist thirty-two different interpretations!
- **The most common view today** takes the parable as a description of the final judgment, which will be based only on our treatment of our needy fellows. This view stresses social consciousness and Jesus's love command. It takes Jesus's "least of these" as anyone in need and makes salvation depend on one's efforts to help such. Some who hold the view are sensitive that it is not distinctively Christian and attempt to place it in a Christian context. Mother Theresa famously quoted this passage in her life of self-denial and compassion.
- This view is untenable firstly because of Jesus's reference to "brothers", which is always in Matthew a reference to fellow disciples (unless referring directly to a biological sibling), and not broadly anyone in need.
- Another major problem is the emphasis on good works of compassion being the key fruit identifying the righteous. While compassion is certainly part of Jesus's teaching, one would expect a far broader description of the fruit evidencing salvation than just ministries of mercy, which while present in Matthew, has not been central (e.g. the Sermon on the Mount endorses helping the poor - 6:2-4 for example - but far more voluminous are other ethical concerns). In other words, there is no doubt that Jesus modelled and elsewhere taught the necessity of helping all who were needy, but this particular passage is not part of that teaching, and cannot be the specific salvation trigger.
- **A second common view** is that of classic dispensationalism, which sets the passage in a specific eschatological niche: the judgment of the nations that survive the future eschatological tribulation. Participation in the future earthly millennium hangs in the balance, and the basis of judgment is how the nations have treated the Jews during their persecution by the antichrist.
- The strength of this view is the particular works described, that is mercy to those persecuted (i.e. the Jews, in this view) correlates with the particular circumstances of suffering and persecution, and the resulting blessedness is in accordance with the actions.
- A criticism of this view is that it is unlikely that Jesus, or Matthew has this developed dispensational system in mind. A further criticism is Matthew's use of the term "brother" does not seem to directly indicate Jews per se (although it does not restrict it).

- **The third view** is the one most widely held throughout the church's history, and held by commentators like Turner. As does the first view, it takes the passage as depicting the final judgment of all humanity, but it disagrees on the identity of the needy in the parable, taking them either as Christians in general or Christian missionaries in particular. In this view, the faith of individual humans is tested by their treatment of the community that embodies and extends the message of Jesus. The sheep are those whose faith is demonstrated by works that help needy fellow believers; the goats are those whose lack of such helpful works demonstrates they are not true followers of Jesus, whether they profess to be so or not.
- The strength of this view is its understanding of Jesus's needy disciples in the Matthean context rather than in a modern context that emphasizes the brotherhood of all humans.
- One supposed weakness of the view is that it does not account for the surprise of the sheep at their inheritance of the kingdom.
- A major weakness (in my own view) is similar to the first view, in that it seems unlikely in the weight of Jesus's ethical teachings that mercy towards other disciples is the key identifying fruit of the righteous. Related is the fact that mercy towards all the needy is encouraged for disciples, not just for fellows.
- I have personally become convinced that the dispensational (second view) approach is best. While not agreeing with all aspects of dispensational eschatology I think the general approach is best for the following reasons:
 - i. This approach makes best sense of the clear Old Testament allusions articulated in the end of the eschatological portion of the discourse, prior to the parables. Jesus is continuing from where he left off in 24:29-31, and the Hebrew Bible allusions are not just a repository of symbols that Jesus is dipping into, but rather an explanation of fulfillment. The scene in 25:31-46 exactly fulfills promises and expectations in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in Zechariah 12-14 & Joel 2-3. It has already been pointed out that Jesus seems to quote Zechariah 12:12 directly from the LXX in Matt 24:30, and a continued reading of Zechariah 12-14 correlates directly with the envisioned final war and a gathering of the nations (Matt 24:28, Zech 14:1-5). In addition Joel 3:10 & 12 correlates the cosmic signs (24:29) with the gathering of the nations for judgment (25:32).
 - ii. The view that Jesus does not have this advanced system of eschatology in mind is incorrect, since Jesus particularly references the prophecies of Daniel (24:15), not just in general but the particular event of the 'abomination of desolation'. Notable is Jesus's word for us to 'know & understand' ("*let the reader understand*" v15) what he is talking about in referring to Daniel's prophecies! Therefore, while he may not be giving as much time to detailed events as Daniel does, he seems to want us to go and understand the detailed events in Daniel!
 - iii. The particular righteous actions of mercy & compassion to the persecuted elect can more easily be balanced with the blessedness of entrance to the kingdom. One only need think of actions to Jews in the times of the Holocaust and Pogroms to realise the root of righteousness leading to blessedness of entrance in the kingdom.