

**True or False  
Prophet? Perilous  
Times, the Last Days,  
and the Abomination  
of Desolation**

**Book ( )**

**By GHOSTONTHENET**

I now move onto a famous passage in the three synoptic gospels, as my defense of Yeshua as prophet would be incomplete without writing on it, because it and similar passages are frequently used for the assertion that Yeshua is a false prophet. Because I have argued the discourse and other passages make the fulfillment have to occur in the first century, I will likewise make my case that it did happen starting from the beginning. My defense will be from within the orthodox preterist framework.

## **The Temple fell down, and all the king's horses and all the king's men, couldn't put it back together again!**

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."  
(Matthew 24:1-2 ESV)

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."  
(Mark 13:1-2 ESV)

And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."  
(Luke 21:5-6 ESV)

In this passage in all three gospels with this discourse, Yeshua's disciples talk of how beautiful the temple is and what is good about it. Indeed, Josephus indicated it was quite a splendor,

So Herod took away the old foundations, and laid others, and erected the temple upon them, being in length twenty additional cubits, and in height twenty additional cubits... Now the temple was built of stones that were white and strong, and each of their length was twenty-five cubits, their height was eight, and their breadth about twelve; and the whole structure, as also the structure of the royal cloister, was on each side much lower, but the middle was much higher, till they were visible to those that dwelt in the country for a great many furlongs, but chiefly to such as lived over against them and those that approached them. The temple had doors also at the entrance, and lintels over them, of the same height with the temple itself. They were adorned with embroidered veils, with their flowers of purple, and pillars interwoven: and over these, but under the crown-work, was spread a golden vine, with its branches hanging down from a great height, the largeness and fine workmanship of which was a surprising sight to the spectators, to see what vast materials there were, and with what great skill the

workmanship was done. He also encompassed the entire temple with very large cloisters, contriving them to be in due proportion thereto; and he laid out larger sums of money upon them than had been done before him, till it seemed that no one else had so greatly adorned the temple as he had done. There was a large wall to both the cloisters; which wall was itself the most prodigious work that was ever heard of by man. This hill it was which Solomon, who was the first of our kings, by divine revelation, encompassed with a wall; it was excellent workmanship upwards, and round the top of it. He also built a wall below, beginning at the bottom, which was encompassed by a deep valley; and at the south side he laid rocks together and bound them one to another with lead, and included some of the inner parts, till it proceeded to a great height, and till both the largeness of the square edifice and its altitude were immense, and till the vastness of the stones in the front were plainly visible on the outside, yet so that the inward parts were fastened together with iron, and preserved the joints immovable for all future times... and round about the entire temple were fixed the spoils taken from barbarous nations; all these had been dedicated to the temple by Herod, with the addition of these he had taken from the Arabians. <sup>1</sup>

Judging by this passage two things seem to me to be apparent, the first is the sheer impressiveness of the edifice, and the unlikelihood of the destruction of this building by accident. As Dispensationalist John Walvoord argued, "Secular sources indicate that the stones were often ten, twenty, or even thirty tons, cut precisely to size, put on rollers, rolled from the quarry to the temple site up dirt ramps, and then fit into place. No mortar was required because of the precise fit. For such huge stones to be dislodged implied deliberate destruction."<sup>2</sup> Of course we know that the actual destruction of the temple was by the Roman armies in A.D. 70. presumably the agents of divine providence against the land. It may be asked, 'why would God destroy his own temple?' Presumably this was a covenant penalty for disobeying the recently inaugurated New Covenant in Christ's blood. As my title of this subsection implied, nobody has ever successfully tried to rebuild the temple, which is not to say nobody had ever tried. George Peter Holford noted,

In order to invalidate this evidence [for the truth of Christianity because of the fulfillment of the prediction of the destruction of the temple –Ghost], the apostate emperor Julian, impelled by a spirit of enmity against the Christians, about A. D. 363, made an attempt to rebuild the city and temple of Jerusalem, and to recall the Jews to their own country. He assigned immense sums for the execution of *this* great design, and commanded Alypius or Antioch (who had formerly served as a lieutenant in Britain) to superintend the work, and the governor of the province to assist him therein. But (says Ammianus Marcelianus) "whilst they urged with vigour and diligence the execution of the work, horrible balls of fire, breaking out near the foundation, with frequent and reiterated attacks, rendered the place, from time to time, inaccessible to the scorched and blasted workmen ; and the victorious element continuing in this manner obstinately and resolutely bent, as it

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, The Antiquities of the Jews 15.11.3

<sup>2</sup> John Walvoord, Major Bible Prophecies p. 293

were, to drive them to a distance, the undertaking was abandoned." Speaking of this event, even [Edward –Ghost] *Gibbon*, who is notorious for his scepticism, acknowledges, that "an earthquake, a whirlwind, and a fiery eruption, which overturned and scattered the *new foundations of the Temple*, are attested, with some variations, by contemporary and respectable evidence, by Ambrose bishop of Milan, Chrysostom, and Gregory Nazianzen, the latter of whom published his account before the expiration of the same year."<sup>3</sup> To these may be added the names of Zemuch David, a Jew (who confesses that "Julian was hindered by GOD in the attempt,") of Ruffinus a Latin, of Theodoret and Sozomen among the orthodox, of Philostorgius an Arian, and of Socrates a favourer of the Novatians, who all recorded the same wonderful interposition of Providence, *while the eye-witness of the fact were yet living*. The words of Sozomen to this purport are remarkable : " If it seem yet incredible (says he) to any one, he may repair both to witnesses of it yet living, and to them who have heard it from their mouths ; yea, they may view the foundations, lying yet bare and naked. Besides, it may be added, that no other reason has ever been alleged why Julian should abandon his magnificent but impious design.

Thus was this celebrated Emperor "taken in his own craftiness," and his presumptuous attempt to frustrate the plans, and falsify the declarations of infinite Omnipotence and Wisdom, converted into a new and striking evidence of their certainty and truth.<sup>4</sup>

This incident is not alone, Bar Kochba, the Messianic pretender of the second Jewish revolt in the second century, also tried to rebuild the Temple, but was unsuccessful and the only by fruits of the effort were the defeat of the Jews, their dismissal from Judea, and the renaming of the country to Palestine. A modern foil to efforts to rebuild the Temple is a Muslim holy site on that very location, meaning such an attempt would probably greatly inflame the political situation in the Middle East. I suspect that by the providence of **YHWH**, it may never again be seen under heaven.

### **Would you please give us a sign?**

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"  
([Matthew 24:3 ESV](#))

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"  
([Mark 13:3-4 ESV](#))

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<sup>3</sup> Holford cites Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* Volume 4, p. 107

<sup>4</sup> George Peter Holford, *The Destruction of Jerusalem: An Absolute and Irresistable Proof of the Divine Origin of Christianity*, emphasis his.

And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"  
(Luke 21:7 ESV)

Here the disciples ask a fair question, "When will these things be." Presumably "Things" in the plural, refer not just to the destruction of the temple, but also to the judgments of Matthew 23:29-36. I find the next question curious, was there only one question which is recorded without paraphrase in Mark and Luke with Matthew paraphrasing with "your coming and of the close of the age," was it the other way around, or did the original discourse have three questions. Possibilities one and two damage any non-preterist eschatology. This is because if Matthew was the one who paraphrased, the disciples wanted to know "when these things are about to take place," and by the structure of the questions, this is most likely applied to Matthew 23:29-36 and 24:1-2's historic fall of the temple. By implication, this would mean the coming and the end of the age occur at the same time. If it's the other way around, it would indicate the coming and end of the age were interpreted by both Mark and Luke to simply be the time of the fall of the temple and Jerusalem take place. The third possibility is probably the most defensible option for the non-preterist; however, this would raise the question of whether the discourse answers all three questions. From my orthodox preterist view, I could take any of these three options. I have already noted why I believe Mark and Luke's recorded question fits well with a preterist view, but how on earth can "your coming and the close of the age be past events?" And even if one was to do so, how could they be orthodox Christians?

I will first deal with the "coming." Ben Witherington admits of the Greek word used here ([παρουσία](#), parousia), "Paul may have been the first person to use the term *parousia* to refer to the return of Christ. The term itself does not mean "return" or a "second" coming; it simply means "arrival" or "presence."<sup>5</sup> Although it is clear from this (and his whole book) that Witherington is no type of preterist (orthodox or hyper)<sup>6</sup>, he nevertheless admits the term by itself does not mean return or second coming. Hence, it is insufficient to look at the word and say 'Look, second coming, orthodox preterism is dead!' I therefore will look to all my sources on the word's meaning as a first step in determining a probable meaning that is amenable to preterism.

[παρουσία](#)

parousia

**Thayer Definition:**

1) presence

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Witherington, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World* p. 152

<sup>6</sup> Though he does believe the signs and the great tribulation of the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in A.D. 70, and the coming on the clouds and related phenomena are still future.

2) the coming, arrival, advent <sup>7</sup>

But does not the passage speak of the ‘parousia’, the ‘second coming’? Yes, the Greek word *parousia* does occur, in Matthew’s version (24.3, 27, 37, 39; these are, surprisingly enough in view of its popularity among scholars, its only occurrences in the gospels). But why should we think – except for reasons of ecclesiastical and scholarly tradition – that *parousia* means ‘the second coming’, and/or the downward travel on a cloud of Jesus and/or the ‘son of man’? *Parousia* means ‘presence’ as opposed to *apousia*, ‘absence’; hence it denotes the ‘arrival’ of someone not at the moment present; and it is especially used in relation to the visit ‘of a royal or official personage’.<sup>8</sup>

A further source of background material that has bearing on our study is found when one studies the meaning and use of the term *parousia* before and during the New Testament period. The word means “presence” or “arrival.” From the Ptolemaic period to the second century A.D. there is clear evidence that the term was used for the arrival of a ruler, king or emperor. The Latin equivalent was *adventus*. For instance, a third-century B.C. papyrus refers to a crown of gold to be presented to a king at his parousia.<sup>9</sup> Or again a parousia of King Ptolemy the Second (circa 113 B.C.), who called himself *soter* is expected and it is said “the provision of 80 artabae...was imposed for the *tou Basileos parousian*....”<sup>10</sup> Such examples from both the Hellenistic and Roman periods could be multiplied. For example, in memory of the visit of Nero to Corinth, special *adventus/parousia* coins were cast that read *Adventus aug[usti] Cor[inthi]*<sup>11, 12</sup>

By this data, it would first seem that I have been beaten up by the very data I cite. However, I will point out that it is possible for Christ to be in a location either physically or spiritually, unlike humans whom must always be somewhere physically to be in a locale. This is evident from this passage, “**For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.**” (Matthew 18:20 ESV) I strongly doubt that He had in mind that He would manifest a physical presence in every location of the assemblies in His name. Nevertheless it could be fairly stated that this is “a being near,” an arrival the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 17:14) to be with His people. However, Yeshua Christ can also “come” in judgment, rather than merely a second coming.

**"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: "The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.**

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* 5:858, p. 791. I have cut out the sub-root of definition 2 as all it does is have Thayer declare that he himself believes the second coming is in view but with no evidence.

<sup>8</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 341

<sup>9</sup> Witherington cites “Flinders Petrie Papyrus II, 39e; cf. A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), p. 369”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Witherington cites “G. Braumann, “parousia,” DNTT, 2:898.”

<sup>12</sup> Ben Witherington, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World* p. 150

Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will **come to you soon** and war against them with the sword of my mouth.  
(Revelation 2:12-16 ESV)

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will **come like a thief**, and you will not know at what hour I will **come against you**.  
(Revelation 3:1-3 ESV)

I find it extremely doubtful that the intended messages of these texts are that if these churches don't repent, Christ will suddenly physically appear in these assemblies and personally hack and slash His enemies there with the sword of His mouth. Hence, I believe the parousia of Matthew refers to the spiritual "arrival" of Christ at Judea and Jerusalem, using the Roman armies for His vengeance against them. Also notable is that Luke's parallel passages calls the parousia the Son of Man's "day" (Luke 17:24, compare with Matthew 24:27). I call attention to this as this probably derives from the Old Testament and New Testament phrase "The Day of the Lord," which often referred to judgments by **YHWH**, often fulfilled by sending armies against the offending nation. "But what about the "close of the age"?<sup>13</sup> First of all, I will note that I believe that this phrase and equivalents (like "the age to come") occurs so frequently that I should do a full study of it at some point. I do not however, wish to do such a thing here. What is obvious is that the events of this prophecy will usher in a new age of some sort. Among Dispensational Futurists, it is the common belief that this is the end of the church age, which if true would be a severe blow to preterism as churches still exist. The first difficulty with this interpretation comes from the Jewish background of the idea,

Into this scheme of things entered another dominant idea. From now, to the Jew, all history fell into two ages. There was the present age which was altogether bad and lost; and there was the age to come which would be the age of vindication, of glory, and of God. But in between the two ages there was to come that day which haunts the pages of the Old and New Testaments, *The Day of the Lord*. It would come without warning. It would be a day of world upheaval and of judgment. There are descriptions of it in Isaiah 2:12 ff; Jeremiah 30: 7 ff; Joel 2; Amos 5: 20. So now we have the Jews sunk in material and national disaster, still clutching

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<sup>13</sup> "End of the world" in the King James Version is an inaccurate translation of the Greek (*αἰών*, aion) or age.

to themselves the undefeatable hope and waiting for the sudden breaking of the Day of the Lord which would be birth pangs of the glorious age to come.<sup>14</sup>

The present age was a time when the creator god seemed to be hiding his face; the age to come would see the renewal of the created world. The present age was the time of Israel's misery; in the age to come she would be restored. In the present age wicked men seemed to be flourishing; in the age to come they would receive their just reward. In the present age even Israel was not really keeping the Torah perfectly, was not really being YHWH's true humanity; in the age to come all Israel would keep Torah from the heart.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, it may seem that this data itself contradicts me in another sense. In reply, I will note that Yeshua often had His own ideas about concepts shared by others, take for example this dialogue. "Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.'" (Luke 17:20-21 ESV) Which means, speculating on when the kingdom of God will come is an act of futility, its already present in Christ's ministry, contrary to the view that it is a 'Messianic earth-rule' and restoration of Israel inaugurated by military action. Instead it is like this, "Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.'" (John 18:36 ESV) That is, a kingdom not initiated by military violence.<sup>16</sup> I will also note His take on His Messianic role, although most hold that the Messiah will come to save Israel from Roman oppression militarily and restore the land of Israel, He believes He is to save Israel from it's sins. Even when given the opportunity to attempt this sort of military action (presumably with success had He attempted), He refuses (John 6:15).

Furthermore, Christ seems to have an unoptimistic view of His people's future (or at least near future), "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:10-12 ESV) There is no real way around this if one accepts a first century fulfillment, Luke's version of the discourse has the verse, "So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near." (Luke 21:31 ESV) This is exactly where He denies a solid chunk of Israel will be, at least those living in the near future. As to the exact meaning of the phrase, "the kingdom of God/heaven" and its relation to "the

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<sup>14</sup> William Barclay, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 28. Note that my own view of the phrase "the day of the LORD" is at present closest to J.P. Holding's work in *Scheduling "the Day of the Lord"*, <http://www.tektonics.org/dayofl.html>

<sup>15</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* p. 299-300

<sup>16</sup> Upon looking up the word 'of' in Thayer's Lexicon, it was evident that the passage indicates not so much a place the kingdom exists as it's origin.

end of the age,” I hope to write a section on the meaning of this ubiquitously appearing expression.

And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.  
(Matthew 24:4-5 ESV)

And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.  
(Matthew 24:11 ESV)

Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.  
(Matthew 24:23-26 ESV)

And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. False christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.  
(Mark 13:21-23 ESV)

Although separated in the discourse, these are clearly related to each other. We have ‘many’ false christs and false prophets working miracles and misleading a multitude. The false prophets are obvious, but there are two interpretations of the false Christs. One view holds that these are frauds posing as Yeshua Christ, and the other that these are claiming not to be Yeshua in particular, but rather to be the Messiah<sup>17</sup>. If one takes a preterist view, the latter is more likely. This is because it was a day when the gospel is first spreading and Yeshua Himself is not yet so incredibly famous enough to have multitudes of people posing as Him. On the flip side, the first century sees the rise of several claiming to be Messiah or to be a prophet whom attempt military action, all too often ending in bloodshed and defeat by the Romans. I believe the New Testament, church fathers, and first century Jewish Historian Josephus demonstrate the fulfillment of this oracle:

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<sup>17</sup> After all, the definition itself makes this clear.

**G5547**

Χριστός

Christos

*khris-tos'*

From G5548; *anointed*, that is, the *Messiah*, an epithet of Jesus: - Christ.

(Strong's Greek Dictionary 5547)

When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain **magician**, a **Jewish false prophet** named Bar-Jesus.  
(Acts 13:6 ESV)

But there was a man named Simon, who had previously **practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria**, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the **power of God** that is called Great." And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.  
(Acts 8:9-11 ESV)

Eusebius further writes of this Simon Magus,

As faith in our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ was now spreading in all directions, the enemy of man's salvation, in a wily attempt to capture the imperial city in time, brought there Simon who was mentioned earlier, and by lending weight to the man's artful impostures took possession of many people in Rome and **led them astray**. This we learn from Justin [Martyr –Ghost], an ornament of our Faith soon after the apostle's time...In his first *Defense* of our doctrines to Antoninus he writes:

After the Lord was taken up into heaven the demons put forward a **number of men** who claimed to be gods. These not only escaped being persecuted by you, but were actually the objects of worship – for example Simon, a Samaritan from a village called Gittho, who in Claudius' Caesar's time, thanks to the art of the demons who possessed him, **worked wonders of magic**, and in your imperial city of Rome was honoured by you with a statue in the River Tiber between the two bridges. It bears this inscription in Latin, SIMONI DEO SANCTO. Almost all Samaritans, and a few from other nations too, acknowledge him as their principal god, and worship him. And a woman named Helen, who traveled around with him at that time and had previously lived in a brothel, they call the First Emanation from him...<sup>18</sup>

Simon, we are given to understand, was the prime author of every heresy. From his time to our own those who follow his lead...<sup>19</sup>

In addition to these [the Sicarii terrorists carrying out highly successful assassinations –Ghost] there was formed another group of scoundrels, in act less criminal but in intention more evil, who did as much damage as the murderers to the well-being of the City. Cheats and deceivers claiming inspiration, they schemed to bring about revolutionary changes by inducing the mob to act as if possessed, and by leading them out into the desert on the pretence that there God would show them the signs of approaching freedom. Thereupon Felix, regarding this as the first stage of revolt, sent cavalry and heavy infantry who cut the mob to pieces.

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<sup>18</sup> Justin Martyr, First Apology 26, cited by Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 2.13

A greater blow than this was inflicted on the Jews by the Egyptian false prophet. Arriving in the country this man, a fraud who posed as a seer, collected about 30,000 dupes, led them round from the desert to the Mount of Olives, and from there was ready to force entry into Jerusalem, overwhelm the Roman garrison, and seize supreme power with his fellow-raiders as bodyguard. But Felix anticipated his attempt by meeting him with the Roman heavy infantry, the whole population rallying to the defence (sic), so that when the clash occurred, the Egyptian fled with a handful of men and most of his followers were killed or captured; the rest of the mob scattered and stole away to their respective homes.

When this fever too had died down, another festering sore appeared in the body politic. The religious frauds and bandits joined forces and drove numbers to revolt...<sup>20</sup>

These works, that were done by the robbers, filled the city with all sorts of impiety. And now these imposters and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into **the wilderness**, and pretended they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs, that should be performed by the providence of God. And many that were prevailed on by them suffered the punishments for their folly; for Felix brought them back, and then punished them. Moreover, there came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem, one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the Mount of Olives, as it was called, which lay over against the city, and at a distance of five furlongs. He said farther, that he would show them hence, how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised he would procure them an entrance through those walls, when they were fallen down...<sup>21</sup>

As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"

[\(Acts 21:37-38 ESV\)](#)

Now it came to pass while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a **certain magician**, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by these words. However, Fadus did not permit them to take any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them; who, falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem. This was what befell the Jews in the time of Cuspius Fadus' government.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Josephus, [The Jewish War](#) 2.13.4 – 2.13.6

<sup>21</sup> Josephus, [The Antiquities of the Jews](#) 20.8.6

<sup>22</sup> Josephus, [The Antiquities of the Jews](#) 20.5.1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.  
(1 John 4:1 ESV)

From these passages it is evident there were many false Christs and false prophets deluding many through agency of signs and wonders with the delusion often ending violently. Some may argue on the passages in Josephus that he merely states that they promised miracles but never performed them. The problem with this is that Josephus calls Theudas a “magician” although the same passage only mentions a failed promise to split the Jordan River. Observant readers will note I have also cited claims to divinity as evidence for the fulfillment of this prophecy. This is because I have reason to believe the requirement of this claim is evident in the parallels in Mark and Luke.

“Be on your guard, for fear any one should lead you astray. Many will come in My name, declaring ‘I AM,’ and will mislead many.  
(Mark 13:5-6 THBIME)<sup>23</sup>

“Take care that you are not led in error,” was His reply; “for many will come in My Name, declaring that ‘I AM’; and that ‘the crisis has approached’: do not you however follow them.  
(Luke 21:8 THBIME)

Some may ask, ‘so what’s the big deal with saying ‘I AM’ and causing deception?’ This ‘I AM’ is in fact a name rather than a general statement, and more specifically, the name of **YHWH**.

“Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”  
(Exodus 3:13-15 ESV)

Yeshua Christ, of course takes on the ‘I AM’ name for Himself; indeed He makes the declaration that He is the great ‘I AM’ often.<sup>24</sup> As related to the fulfillment of this

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<sup>23</sup> Ferrar Fenton, The Holy Bible in Modern English, Destiny Publishers. This is an obscure and old translation so I see fit to mention its full name and publisher.

<sup>24</sup> See Mark 6:50, Mark 13:6, Luke 21:8, John 4:26, John 6:20, John 8:24, John 8:28, John 8:58, and John 18:5-8 in The Holy Bible in Modern English. Several translations have the translation “I am He” instead of ‘I AM’ in all of these passages except John 8:56-59 where the obvious claim to divinity taken altogether is difficult to deny. However, thanks to the tools available from E-Sword, it is evident that “He” is not in the Greek text and what is there is the exact same words for ‘I AM’ as in John 8:58. And of course, several of the dialogues in the other passages have definite supernatural tones, like this one, “He, therefore, further said to them: “I am going away, and you will search for Me, and will die in your sin. Where I am going,

prophecy, almost none of my sources give the benefit of quoting these cheats at much of anything. However, Simon Magus the Samaritan is said to be one whom made a claim to divinity in my sources, and that Justin Martyr uses him as the main example of men 'put forth by demons who claimed to be gods' is also notable.

Luke's version also states that these men would say "the time is at hand" (ESV) From what I have already cited, many of these false Christs seemed to have been attempting military action of various sorts, presumably in a beginning effort to attempt to defeat the Romans and restore national Israel. In attempting to do this, they could tell there would be followers that the time for victory over the Roman oppressors is close, and obviously the restoration and increase of Israel via the defeat of the Romans and the destruction of the City and Sanctuary of Jerusalem by the Romans are clearly opposites. Hence, the main point of the passage is that in spite of false Christs and false prophets stating they will soon restore the land that have signs and wonders that seem to back up this claim, their efforts will come to naught and only destruction is on the near horizon.

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...  
(Matthew 24:6-7 ESV)

And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.  
(Mark 13:7-8 ESV)

And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.  
(Luke 21:9-10 ESV)

Here "wars and rumor of wars" is a sign of the coming end of the age. Modern preterists call attention to the fact that by their view these wars came in the time of the Pax Romana, or Roman Peace. Kenneth Gentry argues,

Dispensationalist Wiersbe comments: "Note that wars are not a sign of the end. There have always been wars in the world, and there will be to the very end. Wars of themselves do not announce the end of the age nor the coming of the Lord."<sup>25</sup> It is true, of course, "wars of themselves" do not announce the end. But

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you are unable to follow." The Judeans therefore said: "Is He going to kill Himself? Since He says, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow.'" "You are from below," He answered them; "I am from above: you belong to this world; I am not from this world. I therefore told you that you would die in your sins; for unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins."

<sup>25</sup> Gentry cites Warren Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary, 2:87.

because of dispensationalism's large investment in futurism, contextual exegesis, allowing wars to be some sort of sign is wholly lost.<sup>26</sup>

The preterist approach to this passage, however, is quite relevant to the situation of Jesus' hearers, his disciples (24:2; 3) of "this generation" (24:34)...

As usual, a familiarity with the cultural and political situation existing in that era is most helpful. "Wars and rumors of wars" do serve as significant harbingers of the end of the Temple (which is the major issue being discussed, Matt. 23:38-24:3). This is because of the dramatically successful *Pax Romana*, the "peace of Rome."

The *Pax Romana* begins with Augustus' establishment of the "Age of Peace" in 17. B.C. The prominent church father Origen...speaks of the "abundance of peace that began at the birth of Christ."<sup>27</sup> It is, indeed, a time of an "abundance of peace" that gives stability to the Mediterranean basin and, by the providence of God, allows for the rapid dissemination of the Christian faith.<sup>28</sup>

As Gary DeMar writes, "'Wars and rumors of wars' can only be a sign during times of supposed peace! As we will see, the Roman Peace was fragile, to say the least."<sup>29</sup> Roman historian Tacitus states of the turmoil following Nero's death, "The story I now commence is rich in vicissitudes, grim with warfare, torn by civil strife, a tale of horror even in times of peace. Four emperors slain by the sword. Three civil wars: often entwined with these, an even larger number of foreign wars. Successes in the East, disaster in the West, disturbance in Illyricum, disaffection in Gaul. The conquest of Britain, immediately given up; the rising of the Samaritan and Suebic tribes. Dacia had the privilege of inflicting and receiving defeat at our hands, and a pretender claiming to be Nero **almost** deluded the Parthians into declaring war."<sup>30</sup> In this passage alone we read of several civil and foreign wars, and one that almost materialized (which I will include under "rumors of wars").

Josephus corroborates Tacitus on this, "In their suspense [Titus and Vespasian - Ghost] – for the Roman Empire was rocking and everything was in the melting pot – the two commanders held up operations against the Jews, feeling that while they were so anxious about things at home an invasion of a foreign country would be inopportune."<sup>31</sup> "It was not only in Judaea that sedition and civil war were rife, but in Italy too. Galba had been assassinated in the middle of the Roman forum and his successor Otho was at war with Vitellius, who claimed the throne as the nominee of the legions in Germany..."<sup>32</sup> Another notable "rumor of war" came from the effort of Caligula to set up his idolatrous statue in the temple. Josephus writes,

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<sup>26</sup> Not entirely true, Hal Lindsay for example lists among signs that the "rapture" is near, "The increase of wars." (Hal Lindsay, *There's A New World Coming* p. 81)

<sup>27</sup> Gentry cites "Origen, *Romans* 1:3."

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Gentry, *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* p. 47-48

<sup>29</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* p. 78

<sup>30</sup> Tacitus, *The Histories* 1.2

<sup>31</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War* 4.9.2

<sup>32</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War* 4.9.9

Gaius Caesar's accession to power so completely turned his head that he wished to be thought of and addressed as a god, stripped his country of its noblest men, and proceeded to lay sacrilegious hands on Judaea. He ordered Petronius to march with an army to Jerusalem and erect his statues in the Temple: if the Jews refused them, he was to execute the objectors and enslave the rest of the population. But God evidently took note of these instructions. Petronius, with three legions and a large body of Syrian allies, began a swift march from Antioch to Judaea. Some of the Jews disbelieved the **rumours of war**; others who did believe were at a loss how to defend themselves...When they pleaded [to Petronius, whom has now arrived –Ghost] their Law and ancestral customs and explained that it was not permissible for a graven image of God, much less of a man, to be placed in the Temple or even in some ordinary place in their country, Petronius retorted: 'Quite so; but I too am bound to keep the law of my sovereign lord: If I break it and spare you, I shall perish as I deserve. It will be the Emperor himself who will make war on you not I. I am subject to authority just as you are.' In reply the crowd roared that they were ready to suffer anything for their Law. When he had secured silence Petronius asked: 'Will you then go to war with Caesar?' The Jews replied that for Caesar and the people of Rome they sacrificed twice a day. But if he wished to set up the images in their midst, he must first sacrifice the whole Jewish race: they were ready to offer themselves as victims with their wives and children...During the next few days he [Petronius –Ghost] got the leading men together privately and assembled the people publicly, and tried first persuasion and then advice. But for the most part he relied on threats, emphasizing the strength of the Roman, the fury of Gaius...Nothing that he could think of had any effect, and he saw that the land was in danger of remaining unsown; for it was seedtime...So at last he got them together and said: 'It is better for me to take the risk. With God's help I shall convince Caesar and we can all breathe again: if he is exasperated, I will gladly give my life to save so many.'...From there he at once sent a dispatch to Caesar, informing him of his invasion of Judea and the appeals of the nation, and adding that unless he wished to destroy both the men and the land they tilled, he must let them keep their law and withdraw his instructions. **To this dispatch Gaius replied in no gentle terms, threatening Petronius with death for his slowness in carrying out his orders.** But as it happened the messengers who carried this reply were held up for three months by storms at sea, while others who brought news of Gaius' death had a good voyage, so that Petronius received intimation of this event four weeks earlier than the denunciation of himself.<sup>33</sup>

Caligula, true to being an abominable jackal, seemed perfectly content to annihilate the whole of the Jewish race to change the temple of **YHWH** into a temple of his imperial cult. Fortunately, the hand of our Lord's providence over the weather averted disaster allowing for further evangelism of Judea. Lastly, Gary DeMar notes, "The *Annals of Tacitus*, covering the period from A.D. 14 to the death of Nero in A.D. 68, describes the tumult of the period with phrases such as "disturbances in Germany," "commotions in Africa," "commotions in Thrace," "insurrections in Gaul," "intrigues

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<sup>33</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.10.1 - 2.10.5

among the Parthians,” “the war in Britain,” and “the war in Armenia.””<sup>34</sup> “Wars were fought from one end of the Empire to the other in the days of the apostles.”<sup>35</sup>

and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.  
(Matthew 24:7 ESV)

There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines.  
(Mark 13:8 ESV)

There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines  
(Luke 21:11 ESV)

My first citation for the fulfillment of this passage comes from Tacitus, he writes of the time around 68-69 A.D, “Besides these manifold disasters to mankind, there were portents in the sky and on the earth, thunderbolts and other premonitions of good and evil, some doubtful, some obvious. Indeed, never has it been proved by such terrible disasters to Rome or by such clear evidence that the gods are concerned not with our peace of mind, but rather with vengeance.”<sup>36</sup> Granted, he doesn’t specifically mention earthquakes or famines, but he does mention “thunderbolts,” which are a naturalistic event, as a portent. Although unrelated to this particular time, I think Suetonius’ biography of Domitian writing of premonitions of his assassination later on puts this in its context. “So much lightning had fallen in the past eight months that Domitian had cried out: “Now let him strike whomever he pleases.””<sup>37</sup> “With the approach of midnight Domitian became so terrified that he jumped out of bed; and at dawn condemned to death a soothsayer from Germany who was charged with having said that the **lightning portended a change in government.**”<sup>38</sup> Because of the naturalistic nature of lightning, I don’t think it unreasonable to believe that Tacitus had famines and earthquakes in mind as what was among his portents. And of course, this may also include the supernatural signs of Book 5 of his Histories (more on that later).

Kenneth Gentry makes a more specific case for “famines in diverse places” in the first century,

Acts 11:28 mentions a devastating, empire-wide famine in the days preceding Nero’s reign: “There stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great famine throughout the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.” This is probably the famine Josephus mentions as striking Jerusalem: “A famine did oppress them at that time, and many people died for want of what was necessary to procure food withal” (*Ant.* 20:2:5)...Classical writers testify to the widespread, recurring famines of the era

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<sup>34</sup> Gary DeMar, Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church p. 79

<sup>35</sup> Gary DeMar, End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology p. 77

<sup>36</sup> Tacitus, The Histories 1.3

<sup>37</sup> Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars (Domitian) 12.15

<sup>38</sup> Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars (Domitian) 12.16

of the A.D. 50's through the 60's, as we discover in the works of Suetonius, Dio Cassius, Eusebius, and Orosius.<sup>39 40</sup>

Gentry also calls to attention a passage in Tacitus, but only quotes it partially and for my purposes I think it wise to quote more of it,

This year witnessed many prodigies. Ill-omened birds settled on the Capitol. Houses were flattened by repeated earthquakes, and as terror spread the weak were trampled to death by the panic-stricken crowd. Further portents were seen in a shortage of corn, resulting in famine. The consequent alarm found open expression when Claudius, administering justice, was surrounded by a frenzied mob...It was established that there was no more than fifteen days' supply of food in the city. Only heaven's special favour and a mild winter prevented catastrophe. And yet surely Italy once exported food for the army to distant provinces!<sup>41</sup>

Not only does this corroborate our Lord's prediction of "famine in diverse places" but it also provides evidence for my idea that famines and earthquakes are among the portents of The Histories 1.3. Finally, Gary DeMar notes, "War is the number-one contributor to famine and its disastrous effects."<sup>42</sup> My first defense of "great earthquakes" before A.D. 70 comes from the Bible itself, DeMar argues of the relevant passages,

Today's prophecy writers contend that it is the *increase* and *magnitude* of earthquakes that make them significant for determining that we are living in the last days...Jesus simply says that "in various places there will be famines and earthquakes" (24:7). He says nothing about an increase in their number. Luke writes that "there will be great earthquakes" (Luke 2[1 -Ghost]:11). The historical record of earthquakes that occurred before Jerusalem was destroyed in the first century fulfills Jesus' prophecy to the letter. Two earthquakes are mentioned in Matthew: When Jesus was crucified (27:54) and when the angel came down to roll the stone away from the tomb where Jesus was buried (28:2). This second earthquake is said to have been "severe." The Book of Acts records "a great earthquake" that shook "the foundations of the prison house" (Acts 16:26).<sup>43</sup>

Seneca, the Stoic philosopher who died by the hand of Nero the murderous scoundrel<sup>44</sup>, writes of great earthquakes in his day, "Earthquakes, too, have hardly ever been so ruinous and violent as to raze whole towns...Think how often towns in Asia or in Greece have fallen at a single earth tremor, how many villages in Syria or Macedonia have been engulfed, how often this form of disaster has wrought devastation in Cyprus,

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<sup>39</sup> Gentry cites Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars (Claudius) 5.18; Dio Cassius, History 60:11; Eusebius, Chronicle, Year of Abraham 2065; Orosius, History 7.6.17

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth Gentry, Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil p. 49

<sup>41</sup> Tacitus, The Annals 12.43

<sup>42</sup> Gary DeMar, Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church p. 80

<sup>43</sup> Gary DeMar, Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church p. 80. Of course, one who reads these passages will note the primary significance of these earthquakes was the events they occurred in connection with. Whether they have a secondary significance in fulfilling this prophecy I will leave the reader to decide.

<sup>44</sup> Suetonius The Twelve Caesars (Nero) 6.35

how often Paphos has tumbled about itself! Time and time again we hear the news of the annihilation of a whole city...”<sup>45</sup> Similar to this, Tacitus also states, “Towns along the rich coast of Campania were swallowed by the earth or buried from above.”<sup>46</sup> Josephus also writes, “During the night, a devastating storm broke; a hurricane raged, rain fell in torrents, lightning flashed continuously, and thunderclaps were terrifying, and the earth quaked with deafening roars. Disaster to the human race was plainly foreshadowed by this collapse of the whole framework of things, and no one could doubt that the omens portended a catastrophe without parallel.”<sup>47</sup> This is by no means an exhaustive catalogue of earthquakes from ancient sources, but it is all that I am willing to give space to. As to plagues, Gentry notes, “Pestilence, of course, follows especially fast in famine’s train...”<sup>48</sup>

**And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.**  
(Luke 21:11 ESV)

Perhaps some may say, 'Surely there were no terrifying signs from heaven before the fall of Jerusalem!' However, in fact both major sources on the event mention supernatural phenomena so astounding that I doubt any reader wouldn't call it terrifying, Josephus writes:

So it was that the unhappy people were beguiled at that stage by cheats and false messengers of God, while the unmistakable portents that foreshadowed the coming desolation they treated with indifference and incredulity, disregarding God's warnings as if they were moonstruck, blind and senseless. First a star stood over the City, very like a broadsword, and a comet that remained a whole year. Then before the revolt and the movement to war, while the people were assembling for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the 8th of Xanthicos as 3 a.m. so bright a light shone round the Altar and the Sanctuary that it might have been midday. This lasted half an hour. The inexperienced took it for a good omen, but the sacred scribes at once gave an interpretation which the event proved right. During the same feast a cow brought by someone to be sacrificed gave birth to a lamb in the middle of the Temple courts, while at midnight it was observed the East Gate of the inner court had opened of its own accord - a gate made of bronze and so solid that every evening twenty strongmen were required to shut it; it was fastened with iron-bound bars and secured by bolts which were lowered a long way into a threshold fashioned from a single slab of stone. The temple-guards ran with the news to the Captain, who came up and by great effort managed to shut it. This like the other seemed to the laity to be the best of omens: had not God opened to them the gate of happiness? But the learned perceived that the security of the Sanctuary was dissolving of its own accord, and that the opening of the gate was a gift to the enemy; and they admitted in their hearts that the sign was a portent of desolation. A few days after the Feast, on the 21st of Artemisios, a

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<sup>45</sup> Seneca, Epistles 91. Kudos to Gentry for drawing my attention to this epistle.

<sup>46</sup> Tacitus, The Histories 1.2

<sup>47</sup> Josephus, The Jewish War 4.4.5

<sup>48</sup> Kenneth Gentry, Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil p. 50

supernatural apparition was seen, too amazing to be believed. What I have to relate, would, I suppose, have been dismissed as an invention, had it not been vouched for by eyewitnesses and followed by disasters that bore out the signs. Before sunset there **were seen in the sky, over the whole country, chariots and regiments in arms speeding through the clouds and encircling the towns.** Again, at the feast of Pentecost, when the priests had gone into the inner court of the Temple at night to perform the usual ceremonies, they declared that they were aware, first of a violent movement and loud crash, then a concerted cry: 'Let us go hence.'...Anyone who ponders these things will find that God cares for mankind and in all possible ways foreshadows to His people the means of salvation, and that it is through folly and evils of their own choosing that they come to destruction.<sup>49</sup>

I believe I should call the reader's attention to how bold Josephus is in making these miracle claims if he simply made it up. For example, if over all the country of Judea there were angelic armies in the skies, surely this would create a vast amount of eyewitnesses. Think of it this way; imagine if U.F.O.s were at one point seen over the whole of one particular state, how many eyewitnesses would you get vouching for the appearance of these U.F.O.s? On the flip side, if Josephus made it up, anyone in Judea could say that neither they, nor anyone they know, saw angels circling towns. Second century historian Tacitus also mentions many of the above miracles, although with a Pagan spin:

Various portents had occurred at this time, but so sunk in superstition are the Jews and so opposed to all religious practices that they think it wicked to expiate them by sacrifices or vows. Embattled armies were seen to clash in the sky with flashing arms, and the Temple shone with sudden fire from heaven. The doors of the shrine suddenly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to proclaim that the gods were leaving, and at once there came a mighty movement of departure. Few took alarm at this.<sup>50</sup>

To me this passage is useful for several reasons. The first is that it corroborates Josephus' accounts of signs so astounding. The second, is that I believe this is evidence that these weren't refuted by the time of Tacitus' writing The Histories, written some time after The Jewish War. Although Josephus seems to be a source of Tacitus' history on the fall of Jerusalem, I believe that he is not the only source. For example, Josephus writes of the aftermath of the siege of Jerusalem that "All the prisoners taken from beginning to end of the war totaled 97,000; those who perished in the long siege 1,100,000. Of these the majority were Jews by race but not Jerusalem citizens..."<sup>51</sup> Tacitus however contradicts this when he writes "The number of the besieged, men and women of every age, is stated to have been 600,000."<sup>52</sup> Clearly Tacitus' number must derive from another source. Tacitus also lists details that are not in Josephus' account, he has the heavenly

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<sup>49</sup> Josephus, The Jewish War 6.5.3 - 6.5.4

<sup>50</sup> Tacitus, The Histories 5.13

<sup>51</sup> Josephus, The Jewish War 6.9.3

<sup>52</sup> Tacitus, The Histories 5.13

armies actually in battle and their weapons are luminous. Perhaps this may imply an independent tradition, which would be evidence against any refutation between Josephus and Tacitus of such an outrageous miracle, which I have argued would be easy to do.

All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.  
(Matthew 24:8 ESV)

These are but the beginning of the birth pains.  
(Mark 13:8 ESV)

but the end will not be at once."  
(Luke 21:9 ESV)

Obviously, even with all these happening something more great and painful is on the horizon. I would agree with this assessment of the verse, "Jesus described these events as "the beginning of sufferings." W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann comment on this phrase: "Literally, the 'beginnings of birth-pains,' an almost technical term for the sufferings which would immediately precede a new age...The age of the Messiah's reign, seen in the context of the upheavals which surrounded the spread of the [Christian? – Ghost] community, was certainly ushered in with much suffering."<sup>53</sup> In a similar fashion William L. Lane notes: "To express this fact Jesus used a phrase which became technical in rabbinic literature to describe the period of intense suffering preceding messianic deliverance, 'the birthpangs (of the Messiah).' In the Old Testament the pangs of birth are a recurring image of divine judgment..."<sup>54</sup> They are mentioned in the context of his answer to the disciples' question concerning when Jesus' prophecies would be fulfilled."<sup>55</sup>

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.  
(Matthew 24:9-10 ESV)

"But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.  
(Mark 13:9 ESV)

And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have

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<sup>53</sup> R.C. Sproul cites W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, Matthew: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, Anchor Bible, ed. W.F. Albright and David Noel Freedman

<sup>54</sup> R.C. Sproul cites William L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, p. 458

<sup>55</sup> R.C. Sproul, The Last Days According to Jesus: When Did Jesus Say He Would Return? p. 36

them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

(Mark 13:11-13 ESV)

But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.

(Luke 21:12-19 ESV)

The fulfillment of this prophecy is easily demonstrated from several sources, and there is so much Biblical data that I can't list it all in its entirety. Fortunately, Gary DeMar provides a summary,

No one can doubt that persecution followed the church soon after Pentecost. Jesus warned His disciples that those who hated Him would hate them as well (John 15:18; Matt. 23:34). From its inception the church underwent relentless tribulation. The Book of Acts records many instances of persecution. Peter and John were arrested and put in jail (Acts 4:3). They were warned not to speak to any man in the name of Jesus (4:27). After another arrest, they were again instructed not to teach in the name of Jesus. But this time, upon their release they were "flogged" (5:40) as a warning. The tribulation worsened with the death of Stephen (7:54-60).

After this first wave of mistreatment, "a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (8:1). Persecutions continued as Saul was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (9:1). In addition to the religious terrorism of Saul, "Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword" (12:1-2). Herod, seeing that this pleased the Jews, "proceeded to arrest Peter also" (12:3).

In time the crowds even turned on the disciples in frenzied persecution: "Jews came from...Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead" (14:19). Thomas Newton comments: "Some are 'brought before rulers and kings,' as Paul before Gallio (18:3) Felix, (24: ) Festus and Agrippa, (25: ).... Some are *beaten*, as Paul and Silas: (26:23)..."<sup>56</sup> Paul writes: "Five times I received from the Jews thirty-

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<sup>56</sup> DeMar cites Thomas Newton, Dissertations on the Prophecies, Which Have Remarkably Been Fulfilled, and at this Time are Fulfilling in the World p. 339. I have changed Roman numerals to Arabic numerals.

nine lashes. Three times I was beaten by rods, once I was stoned.... I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles” (2 Cor. 11:24-26).<sup>57</sup>

Suetonius also corroborates Jewish persecution of Christians when he writes, “Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius –Ghost] expelled them from the city.”<sup>58</sup> Several have noted the connection between “Chrestus” in this passage and Yeshua Christ.<sup>59</sup> For my purposes it is important to note that it is said that our Lord whom was crucified in the reign of Tiberius Caesar provoked “continuous disturbances” among the Jews. If what we read from the Book of Acts is any indication, this fits well with some of the zealous persecutions of Christians attempting to spread the teaching of The Way at Rome.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, this backfires when Claudius expels the Jews at Rome for this lawless behavior. Nero Caesar beginning in A.D. 64 inflicted another notable persecution upon the Christians after a great fire in Rome. Tacitus describes it when he wrote,

But neither human resources, nor imperial munificence, nor appeasement of the gods, eliminated sinister suspicions that the fire had been instigated. To suppress this rumour Nero fabricated scapegoats – and punished the with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius’ reign by the governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilatus. But in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judaea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome. All degraded and shameful practices collect and flourish in the capital.

First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned – not so much for incendiarism as for their anti-social tendencies. Their deaths were made farcial. Dressed in wild animal’s skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight. Nero provided his Gardens for the spectacle, and exhibited displays in the Circus, at which he mingled with the crowd – or stood in a chariot, dressed as a charioteer. Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For they felt that they were being sacrificed to one man’s brutality rather than to the national interest.<sup>61</sup>

Suetonius, Clement of Rome, Tertullian, and more sources than I could here list corroborate the story. Suetonius listed among the ‘good acts’ of Nero that, “Punishments

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<sup>57</sup> Gary DeMar, Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church p. 83

<sup>58</sup> Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars (Claudius) 5.25

<sup>59</sup> For more information, see J.P. Holding, Suetonius: Riding the Chrestus, [http://www.tektonics.org/tekton\\_01\\_01\\_01\\_ST.html](http://www.tektonics.org/tekton_01_01_01_ST.html)

<sup>60</sup> Another notable persecution is the account of the Martyrdom of James the brother of our Lord. Sources on this are Josephus, The Antiquities of the Jews 20.9.1, and Eusebius citing church father Hegesippus in Ecclesiastical History 2.23, see also 3.5

<sup>61</sup> Tacitus, The Annals 15.44

were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief...”<sup>62</sup> Clement of Rome also used it as an example in his teaching on jealousy,

Besides these men of saintly life, there are many more of the elect who have undergone hardships and torments instigated by jealousy, and provide admirable object lessons for ourselves. There were women, hounded by jealousy to appear as Danaids and Dirces, who endured fearful and diabolical tortures; yet in spite of their bodily frailty they finished the race of faith unshaken, and received their noble reward.<sup>63</sup>

Christ gives a bleak image of these persecutions; even family members betray each other, the danger of apostasy is high. Gentry notes, “Tacitus even eludes to apostasy during the Neronic persecution: “First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then *on their information*, large numbers of others were arrested.””<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, he admonishes his hearers to consider eternity, slightly after saying followers of The Way will be killed, he says “**But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.**” Because of the obvious contradiction if the meaning deals with what will occur to the normal body of flesh and blood, it is clear that life after death is intended.

**And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.**  
(Matthew 24:12 ESV)

I will admit that within my own orthodox preterist camp there is not as much exposition of this passage as there could be making my task loftier. However, Judea, first of all fits the bill in this verse especially well in my opinion, Gentry notes why this is so,

“Lawlessness”...well describes Jewish conditions around the era of the destruction of the Temple. Josephus says that the Jewish Zealots act “as though they had covenanted to annul the laws of nature along with those of their country” and that “every human ordinance was trampled underfoot” (*Wars* 4:6:3). He notes that “in the first place, all the people of every place betook themselves to rapine; after which they got together in bodies, in order to rob the people of the country, insomuch that for barbarity and iniquity...those of the same nation did no way differ from the Romans; nay, it seemed to be a much lighter thing to be ruined by the Romans than by themselves” (*Wars* 4:3:2). Josephus again writes: “It is therefore impossible to go distinctly over every instance of these men’s iniquity...I shall therefore speak my mind at once here briefly: - That neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did **any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness that** [sic. “than”? –Ghost] **this was, from the**

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<sup>62</sup> Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (Nero) 6.16

<sup>63</sup> Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* (1 Clement) 6.

<sup>64</sup> Kenneth Gentry, *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* p. 53. I don’t think however that the reasons for divulging the identities of other Christians was monolithically apostasy, because Roman society believed testimony gained from torture was legit testimony. Chances are, some buckled under pressure of the threat of torture and death (like in the Tacitus and Clement cites), departing from the faith, while others stuck to it but divulged information under torture.

**beginning of the world”<sup>65</sup>** (*Wars* 5:10:5). Elsewhere he continues: “The Idumeans also strove with these men who should be guilty of the greatest madness! For they [all], vile wretches as they were, cut the throats of the high priests, that so no part of a religious regard to God might be preserved; they thence proceeded to destroy utterly the last remains of a political government, and introduced the most complete scene of iniquity...in all instances that were practicable; under which scene that sort of people that were called Zealots grew up, and who indeed corresponded to the name, for they imitated every wicked work; nor, if their memory suggested any evil thing that had formerly been done, did they avoid zealously to pursue the same; and although they gave themselves that name from their zeal for what was good, yet did it agree to them only by way of irony, on account of those they had unjustly treated by their wild and brutish disposition, or as thinking the greatest mischiefs to be the greatest good” (*Wars* 7:8:1).<sup>66</sup>

In favor of this is the fact that the verse immediately before this was the one mentioning false prophets misleading many (which I have already dealt with). Also, the political instability following Nero’s death may have caused abounding lawlessness, much like many of the wars then exploited the time when “everything was in the melting pot.” Indeed, Tacitus paints this kind of picture in a setting that is at minimum the city of Rome,

Sacred rites were grossly profaned, and there was adultery among the great. The sea swarmed with exiles, and the cliffs were red with blood. Worse horrors reigned in the city. To be rich or well born, to hold office or refuse it, was a crime: merit of any kind meant certain ruin. Nor were the informers more hated for their crimes than for their prizes: some carried off a priesthood or the consulship as their spoil, others won administrative office and a place at the heart of power: the hatred and fear they inspired worked universal havoc. Slaves were bribed against their masters, freedmen against their patrons, and, **if a man had no enemies, he was ruined by his friends.** However, the period was not so utterly barren as to yield no examples of heroism. Mothers accompanied their sons in flight, wives followed husbands into exile: one saw here a kinsman’s courage and there a son-in-law’s devotion: slaves obstinately faithful even on the rack: distinguished men bravely facing the utmost strains and matching in their end the famous deaths of older times. Besides these manifold disasters to mankind, there were portents in the sky and on the earth, thunderbolts and other premonitions of good and evil, some doubtful, some obvious. Indeed, never has it been proven by such terrible disasters to Rome or by such clear evidence that the gods are concerned not with our piece of mind, but rather vengeance.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Emphasis mine. Was it worse than the generation of Noah before the flood? Perhaps this may be hyperbole on Josephus’ part, but the emphasis still stands.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Gentry, *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* p. 52-53. The reader may note I have repeatedly skipped text and yet it reads like a continuous sentence, this is because I have omitted Gentry’s parenthesis that included Greek showing the relation of the previous word to the one for “lawlessness.”

<sup>67</sup> Tacitus, *The Histories* 1.2-3

This is certainly a bleak scene, speaking of so many resorting to ill-gotten gains, even one's own friends ruining him in place of nonexistent enemies. Tacitus also implies that those he mentioned as evidence that the period yielded some "examples of heroism" seem to be the exception rather than a common sighting. It is only "here" and "there" that one encounters some of his examples, rather than something like "frequently". Although I had already cited it, I list the next passage immediately after it as evidence that Tacitus considered this among the "manifold disasters to mankind" that he so boldly assert the gods are concerned only with vengeance. This fits the shape of the text well, he lists the death of four emperors slain in a brief period, multitudes of wars, natural disasters, the city of Rome set on fire, and then he moves on to this passage as another piece of evidence, before ending his case with the "manifold portents" that occurred then to complete his case for what he says next. Finally, though I lack the research to affirm or deny with confidence (I do however, think it would be an interesting line of study), perhaps DeMar is right when he says "A history of the Roman era, especially the history of the Roman emperors, is proof positive that lawlessness was on the rise."<sup>68</sup>

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.  
(Matthew 24:14 ESV)

This is surely a favorite verse of futurists, I have no doubt that some reading this have heard the argument that the fulfillment of Matthew 24 cannot occur until the gospel has been preached everywhere man exists, or on the face of the entire globe. Of course, this does not eliminate the verse "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (Matthew 24:34 ESV) from the discourse. At first it seems like preterism takes a double hit, it is preached throughout the "whole world" to "all nations." The first difficulty can be resolved using a lexicon's definition of "world",

οἰκουμένη

oikoumene

**Thayer Definition:**

1) the inhabited earth

1a) the portion of the earth inhabited by the Greeks, in distinction from the lands of the barbarians

1b) **the Roman empire, all the subjects of the empire**

1c) the whole inhabited earth, the world

1d) the inhabitants of the earth, men

2) the universe, the world<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Gary DeMar, Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church p.

<sup>69</sup> Joseph Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament 5:157, (p.?) 674

It may be asked; ‘how do we know it’s the first definition and not the second?’ To answer, it should first be noted that Christ also says “truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” (Matthew 10:23 ESV) The reconciliation of these two verses is simple, there is sufficient time to evangelize the empire, or perhaps a little beyond it in a not terribly thorough fashion but insufficient time to preach the gospel throughout the cities of Israel more thoroughly. Second, oikoumene is used in this sense elsewhere

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the *world* (oikoumene) should be registered.  
(Luke 2:1 ESV)

And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the *world* (oikoumene) (this took place in the days of Claudius).  
(Acts 11:28 ESV)

As to the difficulty with the phrase “all nations,” the difficulty is resolved by citing another usage of its equivalent,

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from **every nation under heaven**.  
(Acts 2:5 ESV)

Of all the various pieces of evidence used by preterists, my personal favorite comes from various church fathers. Clement of Rome wrote, “And Paul, because of jealousy and contention, has become the very time of endurance rewarded. He was in bonds seven times, he was exiled, he was stoned. He preached in the East and West, winning a noble reputation for his faith. He taught righteousness to **all the world**; and after reaching the furthest limits of the West,<sup>70</sup> and bearing his testimony before kings and rulers...”<sup>71</sup> It is not difficult to spot allusion to fulfillment of various parts of Christ’s dialogue on Mount Olivet here. He uses phrases when writing of Paul highly similar to the discourse (“testimony before kings and rulers” for example). Eusebius concurred;

A still more astonishing story follows a paragraph later, where it is stated that an oracle was found in their sacred writings to the effect that a man from their country would become monarch of the whole world: this oracle the historian [Josephus -Ghost] himself believed to have been fulfilled in Vespasian. But Vespasian did not reign over the entire world, but only the part under Roman rule; it would be more justly applied to Christ, to whom the father had said, Ask of me, and I will give you the heathen world for your inheritance, and for your

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<sup>70</sup> Maxwell Staniforth, who translated this version of Clement’s epistle notes of this passage “The pillars of Hercules (Straits of Gibraltar). It thus seems that St. Paul’s hopes of visiting Spain, of which he speaks in *Romans* 15:24 must have been subsequently fulfilled.” – Maxwell Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings* p. 50. I have changed the formatting of the numbers in this cite.

<sup>71</sup> Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* (1 Clement) 5.

possession the ends of the earth.<sup>72</sup> At that very time it was true of His apostles that Their speech went out to the whole earth, and their words to the ends of the world.<sup>73 74</sup>

One final point to consider if one thinks my writing on any sign is lacking. I believe James the brother of Yeshua indicates that the signs were occurring in his day.

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you... You have laid up treasure in the last days... Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord... Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand... behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

(James 5:1-9 ESV)

Of all the verses used at times against futurist eschatological systems, this is my favorite. Surely several of those reading this have heard the declaration that it is our generation that is living in the last days, or its equivalent “the end times.” They also declare that Yeshua’s second coming will be very soon. Presumably this derives from this passage, **“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 is near, at the very gates.”** (Matthew 24:32-33 ESV) We first have the declaration to “rich men” to “weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you,” he next accuses them of laying up treasure in “the last days.” To retain any level of continuity, this bears two implications, the first is that the “last days” have already begun, and the second is that the “rich men” will suffer from it, presumably referring to the great tribulation of Matthew 24. He next says to the “brothers,” “the *coming* (parousia) of the Lord is **at hand** (eggizo).” Compare with the prophecy of Matthew 24 which uses the term parousia early on and has the passage, **“So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near** (eggus<sup>75</sup>). James also parallels Matthew 24 in using the phrase “at the doors, even using the same word for “doors”. “behold, the Judge is standing at the **door** (thura),” compare with **“at the very gates.** (thura).” The implication of alluding to passages dealing with the signs of Matthew 24 is obvious; because James has seen the signs coming to pass he declares to the brethren that the great tribulation and the parousia will occur very soon and they should be prepared. Here is a final question to futurists, why is it that now because of the signs in this text allegedly occurring in our generation, you say that Christ is to come soon, presumably to ‘open the door’ while James did not actually mean that Christ would ‘open the door’ soon in his day when using equivalent language?

**Oh no! It’s the abomination of desolation, head for the hills, folks!**

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<sup>72</sup> Eusebius quoted Psalm 2:8

<sup>73</sup> Eusebius quoted Psalm 19:4

<sup>74</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.8

<sup>75</sup> Both Strong and Thayer’s dictionaries note “eggizo” derives from “eggus.” Thayer definition of “eggus” is “near, of place and position.” Thayer definition of “eggizo” is “to draw or come near to, to approach”

"So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

(Matthew 24:15-16 ESV)

"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

(Mark 13:14 ESV)

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it,

(Luke 21:20-21 ESV)

We not come to the final sign of the discourse and a well-known passage. The standard Dispensationalist interpretation holds that this is the Antichrist standing in the temple, this comes of a ridiculous denial that Luke's version of the discourse deals with the same issues as the other versions, and inserting a gap where it does not belong in Daniel's prophecy. Yeshua mentions "the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel," I must therefore find what the Book Daniel has to say about it.

"Seventy weeks are determined

For your people and for your holy city,  
To finish the transgression,  
To make an end of sins,  
To make reconciliation for iniquity,  
To bring in everlasting righteousness,  
To seal up vision and prophecy,  
And to anoint the Most Holy.

"Know therefore and understand,  
That from the going forth of the command  
To restore and build Jerusalem  
Until Messiah the Prince,  
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;  
The street shall be built again, and the wall,  
Even in troublesome times.

"And after the sixty-two weeks  
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;  
And the people of the prince who is to come  
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.  
The end of it shall be with a flood,  
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;  
But in the middle of the week  
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.  
And on the **wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate**,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined,  
Is poured out on the desolate."

(Daniel 9:24-27 NKJV)

It is not my intention to provide a full commentary of this prophecy from my own preterist view.<sup>76</sup> Here we have the a prophecy dealing with the coming and death of the Messiah, which also mentions the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple, which was our starting place. Though I refused to do a full commentary here, I will give a summary of the typical preterist view of the prophecy. The first point is that there is no gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> Weeks (literally “sevens”) of years. The second point is that once the 70 Weeks are over, either at Christ’s death or one “Week” after that, the desolations of the city and temple are certain, and the people of the Prince (identified with either Christ Himself or Titus) will destroy it. I will also note that the phrase in Daniel has the abomination that “makes desolate.” There are other mentions of an Abomination of Desolation in Daniel, but I believe Philip Mauro makes a good case that these were fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes centuries before Christ walked the earth.<sup>77</sup> My own take on the abomination of desolation could be summed up as follows;

1. Luke takes the liberty of explaining the cryptic phrase “the abomination of desolation” by writing “when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies.”
2. The reason that the Roman armies could be called “the abomination of desolation” is because of the idolatrous character of their standards.
3. The “holy place” is not the Temple but rather the holy land of Judea.

I will defend the first statement; I will note that in particular Luke writes, “**when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.**” Were I to attempt to express the concept that the abomination of desolation is the armies surrounding Jerusalem, this is exactly what I would write. I also believe this may be implied by the exact wording elsewhere in Matthew,

**then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.**

(Matthew 24:16-20 ESV)

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<sup>76</sup> For that both Preterist and Historicist works are both preterist on this prophecy. Works arguing for past fulfillment of all details of this prophecy include Philip Mauro, [The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation](#) (especially recommended); Kenneth Gentry, [Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil](#), Ted Noel, [I Want to be Left Behind](#)

<sup>77</sup> See Philip Mauro, [The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation](#) ch. 8

Christ says not for the one on the housetop or in the field return for the brief task of getting their belongings or even their cloak. The temple is a confined area, and one couldn't see "the abomination of desolation" there from these locales. In order to make sense of this prophecy if one believes the fulfillment in something that will occur in the temple, they must have to see the abomination of desolation in the temple, and then enter these locales. This makes no sense, judging by the utter tone of urgency, one is to hope there is not even a day's delay caused by travel restrictions on the Sabbath day. I say this as Gary DeMar notes,

Matthew 24:16-20 clearly presents first-century-Israel living conditions. Most roofs in Israel were flat with an outside staircase (Mark 2:4; Acts 10:9). They were commonly occupied (Deut. 22:8) and used for storage (Joshua 2:6) and rest in the evening (2 Sam. 11:2). Once Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, not much time was left for a getaway. There was not even enough time to go inside the house to carry away prized possessions.

[I]n the Oriental houses there are stairs on the outside of the house landing in the court, from which one could escape into the street through the porch. Occasionally, though not often, we are told of stairs which come directly from the roof on the street side of the house into the street below.<sup>78</sup>

In these verses, Jesus refers to the strict Sabbath laws that were operating in first-century Israel (Matt. 12:2, 10; Mark 2:24; 16:1; Luke 23:56; John 5:9, 16, 18; 9:16). Acceptable distances for travel on the Sabbath were measured in terms of a "Sabbath's day journey," approximately three-quarters of a mile as determined by Pharisaical law (Acts 1:12). The Christians would have been prohibited from traveling on the Sabbath by religious leaders due to the distorted travel restrictions imposed upon the populace.<sup>79</sup>

I will next deal with the question of how the Roman standards could be the "abomination of desolation." Eusebius commented of it, "the last scene of all when the Abomination of Desolation announced by the prophets was set up in the very Temple of God, once world-renowned, when it underwent utter destruction and final dissolution by fire – all this anyone who wishes can gather in precise detail from the pages of Josephus' history."<sup>80</sup> He states this is "the last scene of all," in other words something done by the Romans once the city was conquered. I believe Eusebius had this incident in mind, "As the partisans had fled into the City, and flames were consuming the Sanctuary itself and all its surroundings, the Romans brought their standards into the Temple area, and erecting them opposite the East Gate sacrificed to them there, and with thunderous acclamations hailed Titus as *Imperator*."<sup>81</sup> Of course, this incident itself doesn't fulfill the prediction that when Christians see the Abomination of Desolation standing in "the holy

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<sup>78</sup> DeMar cites James M. Freeman, Manners and Customs of the Bible p. 375

<sup>79</sup> Gary DeMar, Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church p. 111

<sup>80</sup> Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5

<sup>81</sup> Josephus, The Jewish War 6.6.1. Emphasis is the translator's, as "Imperator" is a title.

place” to flee from Jerusalem, because this took place when escape would be impossible. I quote it, however as an introduction to the religious character of Roman standards.

This passage in Josephus is not the only example of evidence for Roman standards being idols. Tertullian writes, “The camp religion of the Romans is all through a worship of the standards, a setting of the standards above all gods”<sup>82</sup>. Josephus also writes,

So Vitellius prepared to make war with Aretas, having with him two legions of armed men; he also took with him all those of light armature, and of horseman which belonged to them, and were drawn out of those kingdoms which were under the Romans, and made haste to Petra, and came to Ptolemias. But as he was marching very busily, and leading his army through Judea, the principal men met him, and desired that he would not march thus through their land; for that the laws of their country would not permit them to overlook those [graven –Ghost] images which were brought into it, of which there were a great many in their ensigns<sup>83</sup>; so he was persuaded by what they said, and changed that resolution of his, which he had taken in this matter.<sup>84</sup>

As procurator of Judaea Tiberius sent [Pontius –Ghost] Pilate, who during the night, secretly and under cover, conveyed to Jerusalem the images of Caesar known as standards. When day dawned this caused great excitement among the Jews; for those who were near were amazed at the sight, which meant their laws had been trampled on – they did not permit any graven image to be set up in the City – and the angry City mob was joined by a huge influx of people from the country. They rushed off to Pilate in Caesarea, and begged him to remove the standards from Jerusalem and to respect their ancient customs. When Pilate refused, they fell prone all round his house and remained motionless for five days and nights. The next day Pilate took his seat on the tribunal in the great stadium and summoned the mob on the pretext that he was ready to give them an answer. Instead, he gave a pre-arranged signal to the soldiers to surround the Jews in full armour, and the troops formed a ring three deep. The Jews were dumbfounded at the unexpected sight, but Pilate, declaring that he would cut them to pieces unless they accepted the images of Caesar, nodded to the soldiers to bare their swords. At this the Jews as though by agreement fell to the ground in a body and bent their necks, shouting that they were ready to be killed rather than transgress the Law. Amazed at the intensity of their religious fervor, Pilate ordered the standards to be removed from Jerusalem forthwith.<sup>85</sup>

Josephus also mentions another useful point of data,

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<sup>82</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* .16. The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* argues in its entry on “Standards” that he is “rhetorically exaggerating of course”, this is most likely true but irrelevant for my purposes.

<sup>83</sup> Note that I have confirmed William Whiston, whose translation of Josephus I am using here, consistently translates “standards” as “ensigns.”

<sup>84</sup> Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18.5.3

<sup>85</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.9.2 – 2.9.3

Although it was unlawful to have in the Sanctuary images or portrait-busts or the likeness of any living thing, the king [Herod –Ghost] had put up over the Great Gate a golden eagle.<sup>86</sup> This the rabbis now urged them to cut down, saying that even if there was danger involved, it was a glorious thing to die for the laws of their fathers: for those who came to such an end there was a sure hope of immortality and the eternal enjoyment of blessings...<sup>87</sup>

Clearly, the rabbis want this eagle taken down so bad they are willing to die or provoke others to die for it. But why (beside from the information in the footnote after “eagle”) should they be so eager to do such a thing? Perhaps this passage in Tacitus would explain it, “He [Germanicus –Ghost] saw a splendid omen – eight eagles flying towards and into the forest. ‘Forward,’ he cried, ‘follow the birds of Rome, the Roman army’s protecting spirits!’”<sup>88</sup> In a similar note, Josephus writes of the eagle standard in particular, “the standards surrounding the eagle, which is at the head of every legion, as the king of birds and most fearless of all: this they regard as the symbol of empire and **portent of victory**, no matter who opposes them. [Sound familiar? –Ghost] The **sacred emblems** were followed by...”<sup>89</sup>. From all this, it is clear that the Jewish religion, and by extension, the Christian religion, would think of the Roman standards as an idol, which is an abomination to **YHWH**.

From here, my final burden of proof is to establish that Judea and the area around Jerusalem counts as holy land. This is an easy one, “And the LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the **holy land**, and will again choose Jerusalem.” ([Zechariah 2:12 ESV](#)) Thus, I see good reason to believe the abomination of desolation is the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem for all to see, ready to lay it desolate, with their multitudes of idolatrous standards profaning the holy land of Judea. Of course, some may ask ‘how can Christians flee the city once armies have surrounded it?’ Of course, a sufficient answer would be they could if those armies had to retreat from their intended siege for some reason. There is one occasion that fits the bill. Tacitus gives a brief description of what happened along these lines. “The Jews endured such oppression until the governorship of Gessius Florus, under whom war broke out. Cestius Gallus, the governor of Syria, tried to crush it, but met with more reverses than victories. He died, either in natural course or perhaps of disgust, and Nero sent out Vespasian...”<sup>90</sup> Josephus covers this in more depth,

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<sup>86</sup> G.A. Williamson, whose translation I am using here, makes a note that’s important to my next line of argumentation. “All representations of the human form were forbidden by Jewish law, even in secular contexts, but the Second Commandment was interpreted as forbidding only ‘graven images’ designed for worship, and purely decorative animal figures and the like had been allowed even in Solomon’s Temple. Herod’s eagle evidently had some connotation, purely religious, offensive in Jewish eyes, but what it was is conjectural.” (Josephus, [The Jewish War](#), translated by G.A. Williamson, revised by E. Mary Smallwood, p. 424, note #28)

<sup>87</sup> Josephus, [The Jewish War](#) 1.33.3

<sup>88</sup> Tacitus, [The Annals](#) 2.17

<sup>89</sup> Josephus, [The Jewish War](#) 3.6.2

<sup>90</sup> Tacitus, [The Histories](#) 5.10

Cestius felt the necessity of action now that on every side the Jews were involved in war. He set out from Antioch at the head of the Twelfth Legion at full strength, 2,000 picked men from each of the others, six infantry cohorts, and four troops of cavalry, reinforced by contingents sent by the kings, Antiochus furnishing 2,000 horse and 3,000 foot, all bowmen, Agrippa the same number of foot and nearly 2,000 horse, while Soaemus followed with 4,000 men, of whom a third were mounted and the majority bowmen...Cestius, seeing that their internal divisions invited attack, brought up his entire army, routed the Jews and pursued them to Jerusalem...If he had chosen at that very hour to force his way inside the walls, the City would have been his immediately and the war brought to an end. But his camp prefect Tyrannius Priscus and most of the cavalry officers had been bribed by Florus to turn him from the attempt; thus it came about that the war lasted so long and the Jews were overwhelmed by irretrievable disasters...For five days the Romans kept up their attacks **from all directions**<sup>91</sup> and made no progress... Utter panic seized the insurgents, and many now began to run from the City in the expectation that it would fall at any moment. This served to revive people's hopes, and as the scoundrels retreated, better men went forward to open the gates and welcome Cestius as benefactor. If only he had persevered with the siege a little longer he would have captured the City as once; but I think that because of those scoundrels God had already turned His back even on the Sanctuary, and would not permit that day to witness the end of the war. At any rate Cestius, aware neither of the despair of the besieged nor of the feelings of the people, suddenly called off his men, abandoned hope though he had suffered no reverse, and flying in the face of reason retired from the City. In view of this change of plan the bandit's hopes revived, and dashing out to attack his rearguard they destroyed numbers of cavalry and infantry...Despairing now of openly continuing the march, Cestius decided on an ignominious flight...They ["the Jews" –Ghost] pursued the Romans all the way to Antiparis...<sup>92</sup>

The question of course may be asked, although standards are "at the head of every legion" whether Cestius planned on desolating the city once he had captured it (had that happened). Obviously, his retreat indicates he didn't think the city had actually surrendered, and hence may well have intended to raze the city to the ground upon capturing it. This would provide the window of opportunity, but what of the instructions of the flight to the hills in specific? I believe they doubtless refer to an event mentioned in the extra-biblical (Apocrypha) 1 Maccabees, which deals with a successful Jewish revolt long before Christ's time or even the Roman occupation, which was provoked by sacrilegious actions of Antiochus. The context is this, Antiochus appeared to be at peace with Israel, but launched a sudden massacre of Jerusalem,<sup>93</sup> and having taken possession of the land, he later sets up an idolatrous statue, "the abomination of desolation" in the temple.<sup>94</sup> Later, he sets up his men to make efforts to have Israel renounce its religion

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<sup>91</sup> I note this especially, as because this is a siege making efforts to breach the walls of Jerusalem to gain entry into the city to capture it, an attack from all directions would mean the city is surrounded.

<sup>92</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.19.4 – 2.19.9

<sup>93</sup> *1 Maccabees* 1:29-36

<sup>94</sup> *1 Maccabees* 1:54

with success on some. As part of this attempt, they tried to get a man named Matthias to follow suit because of his respect within the community, and hence possible compulsion of the deeds of others. Matthias refuses and sticks to the covenant,<sup>95</sup> what follows is this;

As he ceased to utter these words, a Jew went up before the eyes of all of them to offer sacrifice as the king commanded, on the altar in Modin. And Matthias saw him and was filled with zeal, and his heart was stirred, and he was very properly roused to anger, and ran up and slaughtered him upon the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was trying to compel them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he showed his zeal for the Law, just as Phineas did to Zimri, the son of Salom. Then Matthias cried out in a loud voice in the town and said, "Let everybody who is zealous for the Law and stands by the agreement come out after me." **And he and his sons fled to the mountains and left all they possessed in the town.**<sup>96</sup>

This begins what became the highly successful Maccabean revolt.<sup>97</sup> However, what follows in the discourse is "days of vengeance," and "the great tribulation," evidently national Israel and those that follow the New Covenant are two entirely different things. I will argue for these prophecies being among other things a reversal of the great victories for Israel in Maccabees later on. Also notable, is that the advice here if the connection is true, it must mean that like Matthias' sons, the Christians must be ready for further fighting for the New Covenant. N.T. Wright amplifies my argument,

It is advice 'more useful to a refugee from military invasion than to a man caught unawares by the last trumpet.'<sup>98</sup> The disciples are not to stay and fight for the physical survival of Jerusalem...What we find in Mark 13 and its parallels is, essentially, a well-known Jewish story retold. It is profoundly similar to the stories that were routinely told within Judaism. It speaks of to the true god [sic<sup>99</sup> - Ghost] vindicating his people and judging their enemies. It is the story of YHWH returning to judge and save. On the other hand, it is profoundly dissimilar: it speaks, as only some extreme sectarians would speak, of Jerusalem and the Temple as the real enemy, and of a little group, around a prophetic figure, as the true people of Israel.<sup>100</sup>

If this is so, it means that like those prepared to battle for the covenant with Matthias fled to the hills not to run away from the troubles upon the land, but to prepare

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<sup>95</sup> 1 Maccabees 2:15-22

<sup>96</sup> 1 Maccabees 2:23-28

<sup>97</sup> 1 Maccabees 6:5-13 reports Antiochus himself regretted provoking the Jews in light of the major reverses that occurred, this remains a consistent theme in the book.

<sup>98</sup> Wright cites George Caird, Jesus and the Jewish Nation p. 21. The "last trumpet" being a reference to what will occur at the Final Judgment, presumably he had the thought of others that the trumpet in Matthew 24:31, with its related phenomena described a Final Judgment scene in mind, more on that later.

<sup>99</sup> One of Wright's habits is putting lower caps for 'God', he explains why he does this in The New Testament and the People of God (preface) xiv-xv. Essentially, his reason is a disputation that using caps implies that it is a proper name, which he disagrees with (for that he typically uses **YHWH**).

<sup>100</sup> N.T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God p. 359.

for a war. So too the Christians may well be admonished to prepare for one, but certainly not to protect the homeland, otherwise that would contradict what Yeshua calls “the days of vengeance” immediately following.<sup>101</sup> Also, Luke’s version has the admonition to “**But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place...**” (Luke 21:36 ESV) They will escape, and yet if the parallel holds they are gearing up for what is presumably a spiritual war after the great tribulation, which would be evidence against His alleged preaching of the end of the world within one generation (more on that later). One possible pushback to my argument on the abomination of desolation comes from John A.T. Robinson, whom argues that “he”, (i.e. the antichrist) is the better translation.<sup>102</sup> Even were I to concede the point, Josephus calls standards “images of Caesar.” And since the war began in the reign of Nero Caesar, whom is widely believed to be the personified beast of Revelation in scholarly circles.<sup>103</sup> Actual evidence for a flight from Jerusalem comes from Eusebius,

But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed by approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> This is because they would be fighting against the will of **YHWH** in doing so.

<sup>102</sup> John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* p. 17, including footnote 19.

<sup>103</sup> See Kenneth Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*

<sup>104</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.5. It is true that according to Josephus Pella was sacked by the Jews before the siege by Cestius (*The Jewish War* 2.18.1), making it either an abandoned city or one with inhabitants unlikely to be sympathetic to Jews from the same country following The Way. However, an interesting analysis I’ve encountered of archeological data from the site and its geography, argued that it was indeed abandoned for a time after being sacked and that the Christians took refuge there where they would have all the essentials of life. The interpretation went on to argue that some of the Judean Christians never left the city and stayed, later founding churches which evidence for is found for their existence.