

# Advance Warning from Jesus Christ

Text: Matthew 24:15–28

Morning reading: Revelation 21



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**Main point:** Jesus gives believers an advance warning so that we don't underestimate or dismiss divine judgment.

## Introduction:

If someone came to you today after church and said, "At 3:00pm tomorrow afternoon, you will be in a life-threatening car accident. Death will pass before your eyes, but your life will be spared. You will be taken to St. Joseph's hospital and helped by a firefighter named Dan who will share the Gospel with you. You must listen to him." You would probably look at that fellow and say, "Well, thank you very much sir. Good day." However, the next day at 3:00pm it happened just as this unknown messenger said. Your car totaled! Your life spared. You were not taken to the hospital nearest to you but transported all the way to Phoenix St. Joe's. And while waiting on your family to arrive, a firefighter named Dan pays you a visit with tears in his eyes, and he says, "I need to share with you a message that changed my life—it is the good news of Jesus Christ." What would you think?

If you have any rational, reasonable brain cells operating in your head, you might wonder, "Is God trying to tell me something important?"

Chapters 24 and 25 are two of the most important chapters about the end times and the destruction of Jerusalem. Using apocalyptic language—which is *vivid, metaphoric* biblical language to speak of terrible judgments of vast proportions—Jesus gives to His disciples and us an advance warning of coming judgment and what we need to do in these days between His first advent and His return.

After Jesus spoke of the destruction of the temple, the disciples asked Him this:

- **Matthew 24:3**—As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

What the disciples heard when Jesus spoke of that enormous, beautiful temple being torn down was this: "*when the temple is destroyed, that's when the end would come.*" They could not imagine, really, anything that had more stability than the temple and the city of Jerusalem, but all of that was about to change. So, Jesus spends two entire chapters making sure they understand the difference between the two events. They wanted things to *anticipate*. Jesus explains that there are signs that they could anticipate of the temple's destruction, but the exact day of His return *could not be anticipated* (24:36), nevertheless His people would need to live in *readiness*.

In our passage today, Jesus answers the question: **when will these things happen?** That is, *when will the temple be destroyed?* In doing so, our Lord prepares them and us for a devastating, epochal judgment. Let us not underestimate the significance of Jerusalem's fall. The fall of Jerusalem meant the end of an era. A shift from the old to the new. Here we will discover how believers ought to live in light of it.

## Review:

Verses 1-14 comprise a “big picture” or broad overview of history from the time of His first coming to His second advent.

Verses 1-2 provided the setting or the occasion after Jesus came out of the temple having prophesied the house being left desolate.

In verses 4-8 Jesus set before us the beginning of birth pangs (which involves spiritual imposters who make false claims (*vv.4-5*), social devastation which tear human lives (*vv.6-7a*), and natural disasters which shake men’s souls (*v.7b*)). But these are just the beginning of birth pangs. These are things that will broadly affect the whole world.

But in verses 9-12, Jesus shifts the attention from *the world* to *the church* and explains three things that will happen to God’s people, or things that will particularly affect the church: 1) severe persecution (*v.9*), 2) surprising defection (*v.10*), and 3) a proliferation of false prophets from within the church (*v.11*). We closed with four points of application which Jesus gave.

1. Watch out.
2. Stay cool.
3. Stand firm.
4. Preach the Gospel.

Now within that big picture of time, Jesus narrows His focus on answering the first of the disciples’ questions—namely, when will these things happen? Jesus speaks of two main events which foretell the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem:

1. The Great Abomination (*v.15*)
2. The Great Tribulation (*v.21*)

## Exposition:

What are the visible signs of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and what does it mean for us?

### A. The Great Abomination (*v.15*)

Jesus begins by linking the destruction of the Temple to Daniel’s prophecy.

- <sup>15</sup> “Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

**Explained:** Now the statement at the end is Matthew’s editorial comment, where he breaks in and says, “don’t let this slide by you, focus now, you must understand what Jesus is saying here. This is a sign not to be taken lightly.”

What is an abomination? An abomination denotes something that is disgusting to God. Something that God loathes and that He detests. It repulses Him. We might say this is something that makes God sick.

Now this particular “**abomination**” is something that causes “**desolation**.” It causes *ruin*. It lays it *waste*. The genitive of desolation describes *the effect produced*. This is something that *causes* the temple to be *deserted, forsaken, abandoned, and left destroyed*. Remember, this is what Jesus just prophesied in Matthew 23:38—“*Behold, your house is being left to you desolate.*” It will be a desolating sacrilege.

Daniel uses this phrase of the “*abomination of desolation*” four times (*Dan.8:13; 9:24-26; 11:30-32; 12:11*). We know from history that Daniel’s prophecy has multiple fulfillments: a *near* and a *far* fulfillment. The immediate fulfillment came in the Old Testament when Antiochus Epiphanes sought to eradicate the Jews and convert the nation to the Greek pantheon of pagan gods. He desecrated the temple, set up a statue of Zeus over the altar, and abolished offerings to Jehovah. He then did something that would cause a Jew to faint with disgust. He brought pigs into the temple—a forbidden animal under the Law—and slaughtered them and poured pig’s blood over the altar! That was the near fulfillment and it was devastating.

But now Jesus speaks the ultimate fulfillment of it in 70 A.D.

- <sup>15</sup> “Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

This ultimate fulfillment would happen within their lifetime. “*When you see...*” It was spoken to those who could apply an action locally (*v.16*). Jesus is not speaking to the whole world or the worldwide church here about things in the great tribulation of Revelation 6-19. He is speaking to those living in Judea at that time. They were to wait in Jerusalem until they received power (*Acts 1:8*), and even when the persecution broke out against the church, they were not to flee yet. But a sign would take place in which they were to then flee the city.

**What was this abomination of desolation?** Matthew does not tell us specifically, but in the parallel account in Luke’s gospel, Luke captures the details.

- **Luke 19:41-44**—When He approached *Jerusalem*, He saw the city and wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, <sup>44</sup> and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”

Because they missed the time of God’s coming to them and rejected Christ, the only Savior, this judgment would come in the form of armies. The Roman armies would strangle or cut off all supplies for help and trample the city under foot. A little later in chapter 21:20, Luke underscores the coming tragedy.

- **Luke 21:20**—But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.

Beginning in 67 A.D. the first of three Jewish Roman wars broke out, called *The Great Revolt*. It began when zealots occupied the temple complex. The crisis escalated over anti-taxation protests, then into fighting. Then Governor Gessius Florus responded by plundering the Jewish Temple, claiming the money was for the Emperor. A raid on the city led to numerous senior Jewish figures being arrested. This prompted a wider large-scale rebellion and the Roman garrison was quickly overrun by rebels. It

became clear that the rebellion was getting out of control and that crimes were being committed in the temple. The experienced general Vespasian was given the task by Nero and he and his son Titus surrounded Jerusalem, invaded the city and the temple, and slaughtered some 8000 zealots. The temple and the city were filled with blood and dead bodies. The destruction was unimaginable! This was the abomination that caused *ruin* and *desolation*.

When the Roman armies started to marshal their troops against the city, that would be the time when the divine judgment would fall. Now Jesus instructed them on what they were to do.

1. Flee the city (get out!). (v.16)

- <sup>16</sup> then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

They are to be like Lot, fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah and not looking back! This was a command that was *local*. It describes a distress that you can flee from. When the 7-year tribulation happens at the end of time, there will be nowhere to flee to or from. This again proves that what Jesus is speaking of here is the destruction of Jerusalem.

When the armies came, just as Jesus prophesied, the opposite happened. The people in the Trans-Jordanian countryside ran into the city and sought for safety behind the walls of the city, and as a result, they compounded the problem of starvation as the Roman armies laid siege on Jerusalem.

My friends, it is always better to listen to His words than to ignore His instructions.

2. Leave your things (don't look back!). (vv.17-18)

- <sup>17</sup> Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house.

In other words, one is to take no thought for the material things of life. They won't matter! If you are home, don't start gathering things. It will be too late! Don't picture a European or American home, but rather, picture the flat Middle eastern roof where the families would gather to enjoy the cool breezes of the summer evening. Jesus warns, "This will be such a distressing crisis that one would need to leave and flee without getting whatever values are inside!" You need to get out of town so fast that you don't even collect your valuables! You are to hit the ground and run! Run! Run! There will be no time to collect whatever treasures or valuables you may have.

Don't even try to change from your work clothes to your travel clothes.

- <sup>18</sup> Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.

Do you hear the urgency of His command? Flee! Leave! Drop everything! Don't look back!

3. Pray for strength. (vv.19-20)

<sup>19</sup> But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! <sup>20</sup> But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.

Why this woe? Because of three limitations that one might face over which you have no control.

- The first is physical or family limitations—“**But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!**” Because if you are with child or have a little one it will slow you down! There will be limitations, and woe to you if you have limitations that you have no control over!
- The second is seasonal limitations—“**But pray that your flight will not be in the winter.**” The problem in the winter is that the streams would swell and you would not be able to ford them.
- The third is religious limitations. Or Jesus said, “**...on a Sabbath.**” What’s the problem here? Well on the Sabbath, *the city gates* and *stores* were closed, so one would not be able to get provisions. And the Sabbath law restricted travel, only allowing for short distances to travel.

Here we can easily see that the application does not fit the church in China or America. It has a local and limited application. Jesus is explaining the kind of obstacles that the disciples would face at the time of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem.

The disciples were to understand three things by this warning...

- The trials are in accordance with *the plan of God*. (v.15)
- They were to be ready for *persecution* not *conflict*. (vv.16-18)
- They were to *brace for hardship* and pray for strength to endure. (vv.19-21)

## B. The Great Tribulation/Distress (v.21)

- <sup>21</sup> For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

**Explained:** Never before had God’s people experienced such intense destruction as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. It was *unequalled* and *unrivalled*. The intensity of the distress would be *unmatched* in all of history according to Jesus. 1.1 million people were killed, starved, and slaughtered at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. It was so bad that it is hard to describe in public.

Women killing their own children and boiling them to survive. People were eating their own waste. The city was filled with blood. Bodies heaped everywhere. Only 97,000 out of 2 million were able to escape the city! The destruction was horrendous!

Some look at the Holocaust and Hitler’s genocide and say, “that tragedy was greater in number no doubt,” but the language here is *hyperbolic* where Jesus intends to *evoke strong feelings* and create a *strong impression*. The suffering was so great, not necessarily in terms of *extent* or *numbers*, but *intensity*. Modern commentators agree that they doubt whether there has ever been such horrendous suffering and slaughter as had taken place at that time.

Josephus said, “Neither did any other city ever suffer as much miseries as Jerusalem.” The Jews impiously said, concerning the death of Christ, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” Never did any other people invoke such an awful curse upon themselves, and upon no other nation did such a judgment ever fall. We read of Jews crucified till there was no more wood for making crosses; of thousands of the people slaying one another in their fierce faction fights within the city; of so many of them being sold for

slaves that they became a drug in the market, and all but valueless; and of the fearful carnage when the Romans at length entered the doomed capital; and the blood-curdling story exactly bears out the Savior's statement uttered nearly forty years before the terrible events occurred.

**How bad was it?** Jesus explains in verse 22,

- <sup>22</sup> Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

There were only two things that prevented it from being worse than it was: 1) *His divine hand of intercession which restrained the evil*, and 2) *the presence of the elect*.

Spurgeon said, "for the sake of His elect the Lord *withholds* many judgments and *shortens* others...out of regard to His elect the Lord *dampens the flame*...He *preserves the race for the sake of His chosen*...many a sinner *lives* because of the prayers of a mother, or wife, or daughter to whom the Lord has respect."

Jesus said, "None would have been saved. All would have been killed, if it were not for My plan and My people." This is our Lord's answer to the question of *when the temple would be destroyed*.

**REVIEW:** When would it happen? When the *abomination which makes desolate occurs*. When the armies of the enemy surround the city under the judgment of God because they missed their opportunity of visitation when the Messiah came to her (*John 1:11-12*). ISRAEL DID NOT RECOGNIZE the time of her visitation. DO YOU? Matthew says, "*Let the reader understand...*" (v.15)

**What does Jesus want us to understand?**

He wants us to understand WHAT IS NOT a sign of His Second Coming and the end of the age. When this horrendous destruction happens, it is not a sign of His return. Don't be deceived—I will not be coming back to save Jerusalem.

- <sup>23</sup> Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There *He is*,' do not believe *him*. <sup>24</sup> For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

Here now, "**false Christs and false prophets**" are linked together to show that *the deception will affect people in the world and in the church*.

People will so yearn for a deliverer at that time, but "don't be deceived," Jesus says, "I am not coming." "I will not save Jerusalem." When someone makes the claim that I have come, "don't believe them." There will be *no escape from the city to come where I am*.

How far will it go? In the midst of the terrible suffering, false Messiahs and prophets will show "**great signs**" (false lying signs) and "**wonders**" (things that make you go "wow"), but Jesus said, "*don't believe them*." Don't believe *what your eyes see*, believe what My Word says!

People will desperately desire some deliverer and will cling to any hope that that the Christ will come to save them, but it will not happen. Don't be *gullible*! Don't be *vulnerable* to these false Messiahs and prophets. *Seeing is not believing*. If you live by what you can see, it will make you liable to deception.

- <sup>25</sup> Behold, I have told you in advance.

In other words, *hear Me now!* To be *forewarned* is to be *forearmed*.

Here is a common mark of spiritual imposters. They always have some *secret place to go to* or some *special access to grant to the unsuspecting*.

- <sup>26</sup> So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, *or*, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe *them*.

In other words, do not believe those who claim to have some secret or private access to the Messiah.

- **Romans 10:6-8**—But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?' (that is, to bring Christ down), <sup>7</sup> or 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,

You don't need to go any place to see Me or perform any secret initiation to gain access to Me.

**So, how will we know when Jesus comes? What will be the sign of His return?** He explains two clear facts about His return.

1. It will be universally visible. (v.27)

- <sup>27</sup> For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

When lightning SNAPS across the sky it is a *sudden, startling, and terrifying* thing to behold. There is no mistake about it when it happens! Jesus said, "when I come, it will be quicker than the twinkle that flashes in a child's eyes. Before you can take in a breath, bam! I'm here! And there will be no question about it! It will be visible, sudden, startling, powerful, and with universal affect.

2. It will blatantly obvious. (v.28)

- <sup>28</sup> Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Vultures are some of the *ugliest birds that God ever made*. It's not hard to identify them. But when they appear, when they start to circle in the sky above like kites, armed with that unique ability to smell death, there is one thing that you know for sure—a *dead carcass is somewhere around*. They are carrion creatures which feed on dead carcasses. You don't need to go search for it; it won't be long until the vultures will gather to it, flapping their black wings and sinking their strong black pinions into the rotting carrion.

Jesus said, 'Likewise, you will not need to search for Me when I come.' It will not be *hidden* or *secretive*. It will not take place in some obscure corner quietly; it will be *blatantly obvious*.

Actually, the nature of His going or His ascension is a precursor of His return.

- **Acts 1:9-11**—And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

## Conclusion:

The main **application** for disciples and us is this...DON'T BE MISLED (vv.4, 5, 24).

What are we not to be deceived about?

1. DON'T GET CAUGHT UP IN THE SIGNS about the end times and the return. Get caught up in the condition of your soul and the souls of others.
2. DON'T DISMISS DIVINE JUDGMENT. Don't *underestimate* and *dismiss divine judgment*. Don't discount it. Jerusalem experienced it. We will all face it.
  - **Hebrews 9:27**—"Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment."
  - **1 Peter 4:17-18**—<sup>17</sup> For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?

The question is, how do I find safety? By fleeing to Christ. (*Eph.1:7; 1 Tim.2:5-6*)

3. DO REST IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY. Christians in that day were no doubt shaken to the core by what they witnessed. But the thing that held them was this...*it was all predicted, prophesied, and declared by Christ Himself*. And so, when these things took place, it deepened their trust, their confidence, and their comfort in His Words, not only about judgment, but also about the way of salvation (Acts 4:12).

Let's make sure we anchor this to our life. As yourself these questions...

- Is there an *example* to follow? (1 Cor.11:1)
- Are there *commandments* to obey?
- Are there *errors* to avoid?
- Are there *sins* to confess and forsake? On the tongue, heart, the action?
- Are there *promises* to claim?
- Are there *principles* to implement?
- Are there *temptations* to resist?
- Are there *praises* to render?
- Are there *attitudes* to adjust?



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