

The Day and The Hour

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Apr 20, 2005

Much traditional theology looks at Matthew 24 and sees two comings of Christ: one in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the other at the supposed end of the physical world. In attempting to find two end times for two eschatological comings of Christ in Matthew 24, some claim that Christ knew what Jerusalem would fall. Therefore, the “day and hour” not known in Matthew 24:36 (and the events that follow) refer to a yet-future coming of Christ, one of greater magnitude and scope than the one purportedly he refers to in verses 1-35. This raises some pertinent observations.



Three Observations

First, there is no indication in the context or in the entire Book of Matthew (or in any other of the Gospels) that Christ looked forward to the dissolution of the physical universe. This is significant because if Christ made such a transition in verse 36, the disciples would have no frame of reference to comprehend what he was speaking of.

Jesus (as a Second Temple Jew) drew from the prophets. So when Christ spoke of the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds with power and glory (Matt. 24:29-31), the disciples would have immediately recognized the prophetic reference of Daniel 7. In this text, Daniel does not refer to the end of the planet, but the consummation of the Kingdom of God, which no Second Temple Jews would have equated with the destruction of the space-time universe.

Additionally, if Christ spoke of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory in the fall of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:29-31), what greater power and greater glory would he acquire sometime in the indefinite future at the obliteration of the physical earth?

Second, if Christ spoke of two separate comings in Matthew 24 and if the day and the hour of his “second Second Coming” were unknown, he could not possibly be aware that his coming in the fall of Jerusalem would occur *before* his coming at the “end of the world.” The point is that the “second Second Coming” (if the theory is correct) could destroy the world before the Romans armies would have had the occasion to surround Jerusalem.

The implication of the “two Second Comings” theory that the “second Second Coming” could have possibly come before the first makes Christ’s warnings to his disciples meaningless. Why should the disciples “watch and wait” with intense expectation (Lk. 21:34-36; 1Cor. 1:7=8; 1Thess. 1:10; Hebrews 10:25; James 5:8-9; 1Peter 1:13; 4:7;

4:13-19; 1Peter 1:19; Rev. 1:1-3) for Christ's coming in 70 A.D. when the world might be destroyed first?

This theory makes Christ's statements nonsensical. Moreover, if this scenario had played out, Christ would have been a "false prophet," claiming that he knew something would happen (the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans), yet it failed to materialize (because the planet dissolved).

Third, if the "day and the hour" of Christ's coming in the fall of Jerusalem were known, then Christ would not have needed to give signs whereby his disciples could know that "the end is not yet" (Matt 24:6). Signs indicating that the end would be "near, even at the doors" (Matt. 24:33) would have been superfluous. Jesus simply could have told them the "day and the hour."

Yet he did give signs. John wrote of similar signs in the Book of Revelation. In this vision written nearly forty years after the Olivet Discourse, Jesus indicated, "Behold, I am coming quickly... Surely I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20). Even at this date, Jesus and John did not know the day and the hour, but they knew from the signs that the time was near.

One Age-Ending Transformation

A common misstep in the study of Christ's eschatological Parousia is that of arbitrarily creating *two sets* of contrasting ages. The one before the cross theoretically consists of the Old Covenant Age and the New Covenant Age. The second after the cross hypothetically consists of the Christian (or Church) Age and Eternity. Most interpreters agree that in the Gospels the references to "this age" refer to the Old Covenant Age while the references to "the age to come" refer to the New Covenant Age. Yet in the post-cross period, many suggest that we encounter an entirely different "this age" and a new "age to come."

The concept of two age-ending programs—one in the Old Testament and one in the New—is without scriptural support. The 'future' of biblical post-cross expectation focuses on the ultimate coming and full manifestation of the one and only "age to come" that stands for the new creation wherein Christ was to be revealed in power and glory (Matt. 24:3, 30). From this perspective, believers were able to taste the powers of "the age to come" in advance of the passing Old Covenant Age (Heb. 6:5; 8:13).

With respect to the "last days" and the times of the Messiah, ancient Jewish teachers distinguished "this age" from "the age to come." Westcott noted, "Between 'the present age' of imperfection and 'the age to come' of the perfect reign of God, they placed 'the days of Messiah,' which they sometimes reckoned in the former, sometimes in the latter, and sometimes distinct from both. They were, however, commonly agreed that the passage from one age to the other would be through a period of intense sorrow and anguish, 'the travail-pains' of the new birth (Mt. 24:8)."

Westcott went on to point out that, “The apostolic writers, fully conscious of the spiritual crisis through which they were passing, speak of their own time as the ‘last days’ (Ac. 2:17; Jas. 5:3); the ‘last hour’ (1 John 2:18); ‘the end of the times’ (1 Peter 1:20); ‘the last time’ (Jude 18).^[i]

In Matthew 24, Jesus tied the “birth pains” with the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:1-8). This latter event—not the cross itself—is the focal point for the *consummation* of the transformation of the covenant ages. The cross was the means by which this transformation occurred.^[ii]

The destruction of the city and the temple, the consummation of the age, the Parousia of Christ (Matt. 24:1-3), the coming of the end (Matt. 24:14), the fulfillment of all things written (Lk. 21:20-21), and the full arrival of the Kingdom of God with power (Matt. 24:31 and Mk. 9:1) stand united within the stated time frame. Jesus identified his contemporaries when he said that “this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place” (Matt. 24:33). It was the “day and the hour” not the “generation” that was unknown when Jesus uttered the Olivet Discourse.

Some of them would live to see the day (Matt. 16:27-28; Mk. 9:1). Jesus particularly singled out the apostle John (Jn. 21:21-24; Rev 1:1; 22:6-10). This would be the “great and glorious day” (Acts 2:20) for which the disciples watched and waited (1Corinth. 1:7-8; Galatians 5:5; Hebrews 9:28; 2Peter 3:13). It makes no sense that they would be waiting for the ‘end’ of the New Covenant Age before the Old one came to a full completion. They would not have to wait for another “age to come” in order to receive the salvation of which the Old Testament prophets “inquired and searched diligently” (1 Peter 1:9-13).

The end that the prophets had in view is the only end spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24. It is the same end that Peter said was “at hand” nearly two thousand years ago (1Peter 4:5). This rules out by two millennia (so far) the “revelation of Jesus Christ” (1Peter 1:13) at some indefinite period in our future at the supposed end of the current age.

The fall of Jerusalem in the lifetime of Jesus’ contemporaries is the historical environment set forth by Jesus as “the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:30).

About the author:

Max King is currently finishing his forthcoming book on Romans 9-11.

[i] B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*.

[ii] Max King, *The Cross and the Parousia of Christ*.