

## The Signs of Matthew 24

1. Jesus stressed there would be signs leading up to Jerusalem's destruction (**4ff**).
2. He made it clear that there would be no specific signs heralding the end of time (**24:36-25:46**).
3. Despite the cry of the masses in the religious world, the signs discussed in **Matt. 24** are not being fulfilled today.
  - a. Instead they were fulfilled in the first century (**34**).
  - b. Sadly, the multitudes of people who look to **vs. 6** (for example) and claim that the war in Iraq is a sign warning the faithful that Jesus is returning soon for a secret rapture are off base.
4. How can so many people be wrong?
  - a. Again, remember that just because a lot of people believe something does not make it true (**Matt. 7:13; 21-23**).
  - b. If so many people can miss really simple things like one church, women preachers, and baptism, then it is not difficult how then people can easily get confused over a section of text that requires more thought and more digging.
5. Jesus said before His coming (through the Romans to destroy the temple/city, not literally) there were going to be many **deceivers** on the scene (**4, 5, 11, 23-26**).
  - a. **Matt. 5:1; 7:15; Acts 8:5-11; 20:29-31; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Tim 2:16-18; 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:1-2; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 7; Col. 2:4; Titus 1:10**
  - b. History tells us that back then the land was overrun with magicians, seducers, and imposters.
    - i. *There was also another body of wicked men gotten together, not so impure in their actions, but more wicked in their intentions, who laid waste the happy state of the city no less than did these murderers. These were such men as deceived and deluded the people under pretense of divine inspiration. (Josephus: Wars 2.258-259)*
    - ii. *But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him. (ibid 2.261)*
    - iii. *Now, when these were quieted, it happened, as it does in a diseased body, that another part was subject to an inflammation; for a company of deceivers and robbers got together. (ibid 2.264)*
    - iv. *Now it came to pass, while Fadus (Roman procurator of Palestine 44-46) 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. (Antiquities 20.97)*
    - v. *A false prophet was the occasion of these people's destruction, who had made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get up upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. Now, there was then a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people, who denounced this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God: and this was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes. Now, a man that is in adversity does easily comply with such promises; for when a such a seducer makes him believe that he shall be delivered from those miseries which oppress him, then it is that the patient is full of hopes of such deliverance. Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers, while they did not attend, nor give credit, to the signs that were so evident and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see, or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them. (Wars: 6.284-288).*
  - c. **Verses 4, 5, 11, 23-26** fit well in a 1<sup>st</sup> century context. Why look beyond? Makes sense in light of **vs. 34**.
  - d. How could so many people have been deceived? (**vs. 11**)
    - i. Think about the mindset of the masses.
    - ii. For anyone who rejected the claims Jesus had made (and claims NT saints were making), and instead clung to his/her own misdirected Messianic fantasies, the appearance of nearly ANYONE answering to the popular Messianic dream of an earthly kingdom would certainly have commanded a following (at least for a while).

6. Jesus said before His coming (through the Romans) there would be **wars and rumors of wars (6-7a)**.
- a. Josephus said in **Antiquities 18** that during this time the king of Arabia declared war against the Jews.
    - i. They lost. (**A War**).
    - ii. Would the saints scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (**Acts 8:1**)?
  - b. Josephus also says that Vitellius (then governor of Syria) declared war against the king of Arabia.
    - i. The news spread throughout the land of Palestine, but the death of Tiberius prevented the war from occurring. (**rumor of a war**).
    - ii. Was there a church near Syria? **Acts 11:22-26**. Let's look at a map.
    - iii. Do you imagine those saints would have heard of an impending war?
  - c. *National upheavals, and brewing wars were the order of the day for the entire Roman Empire. (Tacitus: Histories 1. 2)*
  - d. *I am entering on the history of a period rich with natural disasters, frightful in its wars, torn by civil strife, and even in peace full of lurking threats. Four emperors perished by the sword. There were 3 civil wars; there were foreign wars; there were wars that had the characteristics of both at once. (ibid)*
  - e. Josephus wrote a whole book chronicling the 1st century up until the destruction of Jerusalem. He entitled it: The **WARS** of the Jews. Sure doesn't convey a time of peace does it?
  - f. **Matt. 24:6-7a** fits well in a 1<sup>st</sup> century context. Why look beyond? Makes sense in light of **vs. 34**.
7. Jesus said before His coming (through the Romans) there would be **famines, pestilences and earthquakes (7b)**.
- a. Famines
    - i. **Acts 11:22-30**. This happened sometime between 41-54AD.
    - ii. [www.Earth-History.com](http://www.Earth-History.com) notes that there was a famine in Italy, including Rome in 50AD. Some scholars estimate that 30,000 died in Rome alone.
  - b. Pestilences
    - i. During the Roman siege of Jerusalem Josephus speaks of pestilence in the city due to carnage of war.
    - ii. *Thus did the miseries of Jerusalem grow worse and worse every day, and the seditious were still more irritated by the calamities they were under, even while the famine preyed upon themselves, after it had preyed upon the people. And indeed the multitude of carcasses that lay in heaps one upon another, was a horrible sight, and produced a pestilential stench. (Wars 6.1-2)*
  - c. Earthquakes
    - i. **Matt. 27:50-54; 28:1-2; Acts 16:25-26**
    - ii. One ancient historian records 5 major earthquakes in the Roman Empire during the time we are considering.
    - iii. Tacitus wrote about A.D. 51: *Several prodigies occurred that year. Birds of evil omen perched on the Capitol; houses were thrown down by frequent shocks of earthquake.*
    - iv. *...there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continual lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men and anyone would guess that these wonders foreshowed some grand calamities that were coming. (Wars 4:283-287)*
  - d. Famines, pestilences, and earthquakes happened then (1<sup>st</sup> Century). Hmm. Seems on point with **vs. 34**.

8. Jesus said before His coming (through the Romans) that disciples (then living) would be **persecuted and hated** (9).
- a. **Acts 5:29-40; 7:51-58; 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 12:1-2; 14:1-6; 14:19-22; 16:14-23; 28:16-22; 2 Tim. 3:10-12; Heb. 10:32-34**
  - b. History:
    - i. *Matthias of whom less is known than of most of the other disciples, was elected to fill the vacant place of Judas. He was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded. (FBM)*
    - ii. *Andrew was the brother of Peter. He preached the gospel to many Asiatic nations; but on his arrival at Edessa he was taken and crucified on a cross. (ibid)*
    - iii. *Thomas called Didymus, preached the Gospel in Parthia and India, where exciting the rage of the pagan priests, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear. (ibid)*
    - iv. *Luke was the author of the Gospel which goes under his name. He traveled with Paul through various countries, and is supposed to have been hanged on an olive tree, by the idolatrous priests of Greece. (ibid)*
    - v. *Peter like many other saints, was condemned to death, and crucified. (ibid)*
    - vi. *John the "beloved disciple," was brother to James the Great. From Ephesus he was ordered to be sent to Rome, where it is affirmed he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by miracle, without injury. Domitian afterwards banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Nerva, the successor of Domitian, recalled him. He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death. (ibid)*
    - vii. *The first persecution of the Church (organized) took place in the year 67, under Nero, the sixth emperor of Rome. This monarch gave way to the greatest extravagancy of temper, and to the most atrocious barbarities. Among other diabolical whims, he ordered that the city of Rome should be set on fire... several thousands perished in the flames, were smothered in the smoke, or buried beneath the ruins. This dreadful conflagration continued nine days; when Nero, finding that his conduct was greatly blamed, and a severe odium cast upon him, determined to lay the whole upon the Christians, at once to excuse himself, and have an opportunity of glutting his sight with new cruelties. This was the occasion of the first persecution; and the barbarities exercised on the Christians were such as even excited the commiseration of the Romans themselves. Nero even refined upon cruelty, and contrived all manner of punishments for the Christians that the most infernal imagination could design. In particular, he had some sewed up in skins of wild beasts, and then worried by dogs until they expired; and others dressed in shirts made stiff with wax, fixed to axletrees, and set on fire in his gardens, in order to illuminate them. This persecution was general throughout the whole Roman Empire; but it rather increased than diminished the spirit of Christianity. (ibid)*
  - c. **Matt. 24:9** fits well in a 1<sup>st</sup> century context. Why look beyond? Makes sense in light of **vs. 34**.
9. Jesus said before His coming (through the Romans) that disciples (in that generation) would be **offended**, Christians would **betray** one another, and some would even **hate** one another (10).
- a. Offended = **σκανδαλίζω {skandalizō}** #4264 – to entrap, rip up, to entice to sin or apostasy.
    - i. Were some in the Corinthian church offended over the meat issue? (**1 Cor. 10:32**)?
    - ii. Was Peter offended of the gospel message (**Rom 1:16**) per **Gal. 2:11-14**?
    - iii. **2 Tim. 1:15-16; 4:10, 16**
    - iv. What can we infer from **Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:8**? What do we learn from **2 Pet. 2:18**?
    - v. In Roman historical records writers commonly report that Christians under duress willingly said an invocation to the gods, and offered gifts to Caesar's image and cursed Christ. (**Offended**).
  - b. Betray: idea is delivering another to trouble (**2 Cor. 4:11**).
    - i. False brethren were on the scene (**2 Cor. 11:26; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 2 Pet. 2:1-3**).
    - ii. The MO for those who wanted to avoid further persecution was to turn over inside information about his former brethren. This was commonplace per Tacitus (**Betrayed**).
  - c. Hate: here = to detest someone (usually born out of jealousy/envy).
    - i. Again there were false brethren (**Gal. 2:4**).
    - ii. If you are not a real saint are you in Christ or of the world? What does the world do (**1 John 3:13; Titus 3:3**)?
    - iii. Some of the fakers were Jews (**Acts 15:24**). What motive caused the Jews to hate saints (**Acts 13:44-45**)?
    - iv. Do fakers walk in the light? (**1 John 2:9**) What did Jesus say about darkness and light (**John 3:19-20**)?
  - d. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, before 70 AD, there were saints who were offended, saints who were betrayed, and saints who were hated. Why must we look further? So far it is all happening in **that** generation (**34**).