

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 24:36-44

Year A - Advent 1, Text: Matthew 24:36-44
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Matthew's Gospel contains five discourses, chs. 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–25. The passage under consideration is part of Matthew's fifth and final discourse (chs. 24–25). This discourse is an expansion of Mark's "little apocalypse"; see Mark 13.

In the opening verses of Matthew 24, we read of Jesus leaving the Temple and going away. While He does this, the disciples point out to Him the buildings within the Temple complex. Jesus responds by telling them that the time is coming when the entire complex will be destroyed — an event that came to pass in AD 70.

Verse 24:36: In this verse, Jesus tells the disciples that no one knows precisely when the Temple will be destroyed. Neither the angels nor the Son knows when the destruction will take place. Only Jesus' Father knows. Some ancient manuscripts omit the reference to the Son not knowing.

Perhaps the point is that Jesus cannot tell His disciples the "when" of the coming event because it is a secret guarded by His Father — a secret that is not part of the public revelation that the Son, in His mission as teacher of God's mysteries, has been sent to impart.

It is also possible that Jesus' statement was designed to undercut assertions by Christian "prophets." They claimed to speak in Jesus' name (7:22), to know the exact time of the last hour (24:5, 23–26), and manipulated Christian communities with their so-called prophetic utterances.

Even so, the time of the end is known and is under blessed control. However, only Jesus' Father knows the day and the hour — and that is sufficient. In this context, Jesus speaks of God as Father, an intimate family name (see 6:9) that focuses on God's loving care for those caught in the cruel jaws of history. In the verses that follow, predictions about the coming destruction of Jerusalem are interwoven with references to Jesus' final reappearing on the last day of history.

Verses 24:37–39: The world has been warned, as were Noah's contemporaries in relation to the flood, of the inevitability of the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

In verse 37 and 39, Jesus refers to Himself in relation to His final coming, His final re-appearing, as the Son of Man (see Daniel 7:13). This is what it will be like on the final day of history. Prior to that day, humanity at large will focus on eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage. Although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with these things, people can be so distracted by them that they give little or no thought to their relationship to God or to believing in and following Jesus the Messiah.

Verses 24:40–42: Again, references to both the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the final day of history are interwoven. In verses 40–41, the message is: While in Noah's day most people were caught off guard by the deluge, a remnant (Noah's family) were saved. Contrary to popular assumptions, the ones who are "taken" are those who will be swept away, the one's who are left will be the few who are spared.

When the Romans set out to destroy Jerusalem in AD 66–70, there was remnant of Israel who were saved/spared (e.g., one out of two workers in the field, one out of two women grinding at the mill). God's people are to be ready and waiting at all times for the final reappearing of their Lord, Jesus the Messiah, (v. 42). They are to practice unrelenting watchfulness.

Verses 24:43–44: A thief does not warn the owner of a house on what day and at what hour he plans to break in and rob. If a thief were to do this, naturally the owner would remain awake and alert to deal with the thief — with friends at his side and a weapon in his hand. Breaking and entering by digging through the mud-brick walls of a house was an ancient problem (and still is in many parts of the world).

In like manner, the consummation of history will not be preceded by specific signs that will enable people

to predict its precise day and hour. The answer to the disciples' question (v. 3) is twofold:

- The Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.
- God's people must be ready at all times for that final event in history.

This passage raises an important question for God's people today. Are we so preoccupied with obtaining and enjoying material things (which are temporal) that spiritual things (which are eternal) receive little attention? How foolish to focus on those things that we must leave behind when we can begin to live by Kingdom values and thereby "lay up treasures in heaven." Although God's people are saved by free grace, they are called to costly discipleship.