

LETTER SEVEN — PART ONE

The Coming of Christ and the End of the Age

“This Generation,” Jerusalem, and the Time Statements of Scripture

Before asking where we are on the prophetic timeline, we must first ask whether Jesus fulfilled what He said would occur within the generation that heard Him.

Why the Time Statements Matter

Modern eschatology often begins with current events and works backward into Scripture. Jesus invites us to begin somewhere more reliable: with His own words, spoken to a real audience within a specific historical setting.

The New Testament repeatedly uses expressions such as “at hand,” “near,” “soon,” and “this generation.” These are not decorative phrases. They establish the time horizon within which the original hearers were taught to expect fulfillment.

This does not mean every promise in Scripture was exhausted in the first century. The bodily resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the destruction of death, and the full renewal of creation remain matters of Christian hope. Scripture also uses the language of Christ's coming in more than one setting.

Nevertheless, we must not push into the distant future events that Jesus explicitly connected to His contemporaries. The issue is not whether His words are trustworthy. The issue is whether we have allowed them to retain their ordinary meaning.

A faithful interpretation must honor both the audience to whom Jesus spoke and the time indicators He chose to use.

The Kingdom Was at Hand

John the Baptist entered history announcing, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2). Jesus proclaimed the same message: “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15).

The Kingdom was not introduced merely as a distant political order awaiting the end of history. In Jesus, God's reign had drawn near. His miracles, authority over demons, forgiveness of sins, proclamation of good news, and formation of a new covenant people demonstrated its arrival.

Jesus declared, “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). The Kingdom was present in the King, even though its enemies had not yet been finally destroyed.

This distinction matters. The Kingdom can be inaugurated without being consummated. Christ can reign in the midst of enemies before the final enemy, death, is abolished. Present reign and future completion are not opposites.

Some Standing Here Would See It

Jesus made a striking promise to His disciples:

“The Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels... Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” —Matthew 16:27–28

Parallel passages speak of seeing “the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1) and “the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27). Interpreters have connected these words to the Transfiguration, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, the destruction of Jerusalem, or the larger complex of events through which Christ's authority was publicly vindicated.

The Transfiguration immediately follows in all three Synoptic Gospels and certainly anticipates the glory of the King. Yet the language of recompense and Kingdom coming also reaches beyond a private mountaintop experience. At minimum, Jesus placed a manifestation of His royal authority within the lifetime of people standing before Him.

That time boundary should govern our interpretation rather than be explained away.

Whatever fulfillment we identify, Jesus promised that some of His hearers would live to witness it.

“This Generation”

The clearest interpretive anchor in the Olivet Discourse is Jesus' declaration:

“Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” —Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32

The Greek word *genea* ordinarily refers to a generation of contemporaries. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus uses it for the people then living:

- “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign” (Matthew 12:39).
- “All this will come on this generation” (Matthew 23:36).
- The blood of the prophets would be charged against “this generation” (Luke 11:50–51).
- Jesus described the people around Him as “this adulterous and sinful generation” (Mark 8:38).

Some interpreters understand *genea* in Matthew 24 as “race,” “people,” or the future generation that sees the signs begin. Those readings attempt to preserve a future fulfillment, but they are not the most natural use of the expression within the Gospel context.

Jesus had just pronounced judgment upon Jerusalem's leaders and said that the accumulated guilt of persecuting God's messengers would fall upon “this generation” (Matthew 23:29–36). He then left the Temple, foretold its destruction, and answered His disciples' questions about when these things would occur.

The discourse should therefore be read first as a warning to that generation—not as a coded message directed principally to people thousands of years later.

The Forty-Year Horizon

Scripture sometimes associates the passing of a generation with approximately forty years. The wilderness generation wandered until the unbelieving generation died (Numbers 32:13). Psalm 95 recalls God's anger with “that generation” for forty years.

The interval from Jesus' public ministry to Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 is roughly one biblical generation. We should avoid building the entire interpretation upon an exact calculation, since the dating of Jesus' ministry is debated. Yet the broad correspondence is significant.

Jesus warned His contemporaries. The apostles carried the Gospel throughout the Roman world. Within the lifetime of that generation, Jerusalem was surrounded, the Temple was destroyed, and the temple-centered covenantal administration came to a catastrophic end.

The forty-year pattern does not prove the interpretation by itself, but it fits the audience and timeframe Jesus repeatedly identified.

Jerusalem Surrounded by Armies

Jesus gave His disciples observable warnings:

“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near.” —Luke 21:20

He told those in Judea to flee, described days of distress, and warned that Jerusalem would be trampled by the nations (Luke 21:21–24). He also foretold that not one stone of the Temple buildings would be left upon another (Luke 21:5–6).

These instructions were meaningful to first-century disciples. People in Judea could flee; they could recognize armies surrounding a real city; and they could witness the destruction of the Temple standing before them.

In AD 70, Roman forces under Titus captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. The sacrifices ceased, the sanctuary was lost, and the old covenant order centered upon that structure could no longer function as it had.

This was not the end of the physical universe. It was the end of an age—the public and irreversible judgment of the temple-centered order that had rejected its Messiah.

Heaven and Earth Language

Prophetic Scripture often uses cosmic language to describe the fall of nations and governing orders. The sun, moon, and stars are darkened; heavens shake; and powers fall. Isaiah used such language concerning Babylon and Edom (Isaiah 13:9–13; 34:4–5). Ezekiel used it concerning Egypt (Ezekiel 32:7–8).

Recognizing this prophetic vocabulary helps us understand the Olivet Discourse. Cosmic imagery does not require that the visible universe ceased to exist in AD 70. It announces a world-ordering judgment of covenantal and historical significance.

Jesus' declaration that “heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away” confirms the absolute reliability of His prophecy. The created heavens and earth ultimately remain subject to renewal, but the immediate discourse concerns the judgment of Jerusalem and the close of its covenantal age.

This reading preserves both the historical fulfillment and the ultimate Christian hope.

The Transition Was Already Underway

Long before the Temple fell, the New Covenant reality had begun. Jesus inaugurated the covenant in His blood. He rose from the dead, ascended to the Father, poured out the Holy Spirit, and began gathering a people from every nation.

The apostles taught that God's dwelling was no longer centered in a structure made with hands:

“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.” —1 Peter 2:5

“In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord...a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.” —Ephesians 2:21–22

The destruction of the Temple did not leave God without a dwelling place. It publicly confirmed a transition already established in Christ. The true Temple is the Messiah joined to His Spirit-filled people.

This was not an abrupt movement from one divine plan to another. The law, priesthood, sacrifices, and sanctuary found their fulfillment in Jesus. The old covenant was becoming obsolete and was “near to disappearing” when Hebrews was written (Hebrews 8:13).

AD 70 did not create the New Covenant. It decisively removed the old temple-centered order after the New Covenant had already been inaugurated in Christ.

The Apostolic Expectation of Nearness

The apostles consistently wrote with an expectation of nearness:

- “The coming of the Lord is near” (James 5:8).
- “The end of all things is near” (1 Peter 4:7).
- “The day is almost here” (Romans 13:12).
- “In these last days He has spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:2).
- “In a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay” (Hebrews 10:37).

These statements were pastoral words to real congregations. They called first-century believers to patience, holiness, courage, and watchfulness amid pressures they were actually facing.

Some New Testament passages also direct believers toward the final resurrection and consummation. We need not force every use of “coming,” “day,” or “end” into a single event. But neither should we make imminence meaningless by allowing “near” to stretch indefinitely whenever a passage conflicts with our inherited system.

The responsible approach is contextual: What coming is under discussion? What audience is addressed? What signs are given? What outcome follows?

Daniel Sealed; Revelation Left Open

Daniel and John received notably different instructions.

Daniel was told:

“Seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.” —Daniel 8:26

“The words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end.” —Daniel 12:9

John was told the opposite:

**“Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near.” —
Revelation 22:10**

Revelation begins in the same manner: God showed His servants “what must soon take place,” because “the time is near” (Revelation 1:1, 3).

What was distant for Daniel had drawn near in John's setting. This does not resolve every question of Revelation's date or every symbol within the book, but it places a heavy burden upon interpretations that assign nearly all of its contents to a period thousands of years beyond its first readers.

If “distant” meant beyond Daniel's lifetime, “near” and “soon” must retain meaningful relevance for John's audience.

Prophetic Patterns and “Double Fulfillment”

Scripture contains patterns, types, and recurring forms of judgment and deliverance. The exodus becomes a pattern for later redemption. The “day of the Lord” language is used in judgments within history and also informs expectations of final judgment. Earlier events can foreshadow greater realities.

Therefore, it would be too broad to say prophecy never has layered significance. Biblical typology is real.

The difficulty arises when a clear historical fulfillment is acknowledged and then an identical second fulfillment is asserted primarily to preserve a preferred timeline. Scripture does not present a general “law of double reference” allowing any prophecy to be repeated whenever its stated timeframe becomes inconvenient.

Matthew 24:21 describes a tribulation without equal before or afterward. Jesus then places the events within “this generation.” If the passage was fulfilled in the judgment of Jerusalem, we should not simply reproduce the same tribulation, signs, gathering, and time statements in a distant generation without clear textual warrant.

Patterns may recur. Final judgment may echo judgments within history. But fulfillment must retain integrity, and typology cannot become an escape hatch from the time boundaries of the text.

What the Ancient Historians Actually Report

Ancient accounts describe extraordinary signs before Jerusalem's fall. Josephus reports that people saw chariots and armed troops moving among the clouds and encircling cities. He also reports a light around the Temple, a gate opening by itself, and priests hearing a great sound and a voice saying, “Let us depart from here.”

Tacitus independently records reported prodigies: armies seen battling in the sky, weapons flashing, sudden light from the clouds, temple doors opening, and a superhuman voice announcing departure.

These sources are striking, but they must be handled responsibly. Josephus reports what others said they saw; he does not claim personal observation of every sign. Tacitus writes later and records Roman-era reports rather than offering a Christian interpretation. Eusebius largely transmits Josephus, while Pseudo-Hegesippus and Sefer Yosippon are later adaptations—not additional first-century eyewitnesses.

The historical reports cannot prove that every detail of Matthew 24 occurred visibly in the manner a modern reader might imagine. They do show that ancient Jewish and Roman narratives remembered the period as accompanied by extraordinary portents associated with Jerusalem's doom.

That testimony is a secondary witness. Scripture and the fulfillment of Jesus' observable predictions remain primary.

A Coming in Judgment—and a Future Consummation

The Old Testament often describes God as “coming” in clouds to judge a nation, even when no bodily appearance is intended (Isaiah 19:1; Micah 1:3–5). This prophetic background makes sense of a covenantal coming of the enthroned Christ in judgment upon Jerusalem.

Such a coming does not require us to deny the future bodily resurrection, final judgment, or renewal of creation. AD 70 was a decisive historical vindication of Jesus' prophetic authority and enthronement, but it was not the abolition of death or the final resurrection of all humanity.

This distinction allows us to take the first-century time statements seriously without pretending that every Christian hope has already been completed.

Christ came in covenantal judgment upon the order that rejected Him; Christ will also bring His redemptive purpose to its final consummation.

Review and Summary

The biblical and historical pattern is coherent:

- Jesus announced that the Kingdom had drawn near.
- Some standing before Him would witness His Kingdom coming with power.
- He placed the Olivet events within “this generation.”
- He gave His disciples observable warnings concerning Jerusalem.
- The apostles described their period as the last days and spoke of nearness.
- Revelation declared that its time was near rather than distant.
- Jerusalem and the Temple fell within that generation in AD 70.
- The New Covenant Temple—Christ dwelling in His people—had already been established.

This does not resolve every eschatological question, but it requires a serious reconsideration of the futurist system. Jesus did what He said He would do within the timeframe He identified.

If this chronology is correct, the next question is unavoidable: How should Revelation 20 be understood? Has the millennial reign also been misplaced entirely in our future, and could the “little season” describe the period in which we now live?

That is the question of Part Two.

We cannot understand our place in the prophetic story until we first allow Jesus' words to mean what they meant to the generation that heard them.



<https://eleventhhourministries.com/>

The letter does not end here. Continue the journey as we learn to think biblically, live courageously, and faithfully represent Christ's Kingdom in every sphere of life.

Enter the War Room at 11thHourWarRoom.org

