

Biblical Notes — Matthew 10:23

23 – But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes. (23. Ὅταν δὲ διώκωσιν ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ φεύγετε εἰς τὴν ἐτέραν· ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ μὴ τελέσητε τὰς πόλεις [τοῦ] Ἰσραὴλ ἕως ἔλθῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου)

Many believe this is a Reference to his Resurrection, Pentecost, Transfiguration or the Second Coming. The use of εως — heōs with aorist subjunctive leads to the belief that this is in the future. As to when this might have occurred it is unknown.

Matthew 10:23 NASB

"But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

"What was proclaimed here was more fully demonstrated in the apostles' lives after the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) in the spread of the gospel in the church (e.g, Acts 4:1-13; Acts 5:17-18; Acts 5:40; Acts 7:54-60). But these words will find their fullest manifestation in the days of the Tribulation when the gospel will be carried throughout the entire world before Jesus Christ returns in power and glory to establish His kingdom on the earth (Matthew 24:14)." [Note: Barbieri, 42.]

Secondly, we know that Jesus never returned while the disciples were on earth preaching aside from the Resurrection. There is zero evidence that Jesus came back in 70AD.

6 Possible Interpretations

"The first of three Matthean time-indicators that supposedly support preterism can be translated, "You will not finish (complete) the cities of Israel until/before the Son of Man comes" (Matt 10:23). The text has no synoptic parallel; it has no significant textual variants; and it has no translation difficulties. However, its interpretation presents a huge challenge. About this passage, D. A. Carson comments, "This verse is among the most difficult in the New Testament canon."²⁷ Certainly, the verse should not be among the sine qua non features of any major doctrine. Jesus, in sending out the twelve, tells them what they are to do, proclaim that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (vv. 6-7), which will not be accomplished until (before) He comes. To what "coming" does Christ refer? At least six distinguishable possibilities exist.

1. Jesus meant an immediate coming or "catching up" in the sense that, "I will be close behind, so get moving!"²⁸ The major problem with this view is that the persecutions of vv. 16-23 were not experienced until after Christ's death and resurrection.

2. Jesus spoke of His coming by way of resurrection.²⁹ This is out of place in light of the fact that His resurrection is nowhere spoken of as "a coming" and in light of Christ's NT "coming" being defined as post-ascension by the angels in Acts 1:11.

3. Jesus referred to His coming as it related to the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 15:26-27; 16:7-11).³⁰ Since the Holy Spirit is a separate person in the triune Godhead, that would not really fulfill the promise of a personal "coming" by Christ.

4. Jesus indicated God's judgment against Israel in A.D. 70 associated with Rome's destruction of Jerusalem,³¹ but this did not fulfill the parousia promises of Christ.

5. Jesus plainly meant that his parousia would occur within the lifetime of the disciples and that it would be in conjunction with the A.D. 70 plundering of Jerusalem.³² The problem here and with possibility four is that Jesus did not come.

6. Jesus referred to His future second coming in the sense that God's gospel mission to the Jew would not cease or be completed prior to His promised eschatological return and to the completion of God's redemptive purposes among the

Jewish nation.³³

—— Richard L. Mayhue, *Jesus: A Preterist or a Futurist*, TMSJ 14/1 (Spring 2003), 16-17.

Citations:

[28] Jacques Dupont, *Vous N'Aurez Pas Achevé Les Villes D'Israel Avant Que Les Fils De L'Homme Ne Vienne*, *Novum Testamentum* 2 (1958): 228-244.

[29] Leopold Sabourin, *You Will Not Have Gone Through All the Towns of Israel, Before the Son of Man Comes* (Matt 10:23b), *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 7 (1977): 5-11.

[30] John Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, in *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 16 (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 458.

[31] A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971) 118; D. A. Carson, "Matthew" 252-53; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (reprint, Grand Rapids: MacDonald, n.d.) 645-47; Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word, 1993) 278-80; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 195.

[32] Russell, *The Parousia* 26-29; Sproul, *The Last Days* 9, 13, 24, 38, 56, 86. One is tremendously disappointed to find no exegetical or theological discussion of this text by Sproul, who is eminently capable of such. Because Sproul places such an extreme importance on these time-indicators, it is unfathomable why such a treatment has not been included in his volume.

[33] Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 175-76; F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1983) 109; Charles H. Giblin, "Theological Perspective and Matthew 10:23b," *Theological Studies* 29 (1968): 637-61; I William Hendricksen, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) 466.

"For several reasons, this reviewer favors the view that the "coming" in Matt 10:23 refers to Christ's future second coming.

1. It accounts for the context that looks beyond the disciples' immediate ministry (cf. vv. 16-23).
2. It allows for 10:22b occurring elsewhere in an eschatological context (cf. Matt 24:13; Mark 13:10).
3. The phrase "the Son of Man comes" (cf. Matt 24:30, 44; 25:31) is most compatible with the future parousia view.
4. It does justice to the eschatological imagery that "a Son of Man was coming" in Dan 7:13.
5. The aorist subjunctive use of τελέω (teleō "complete, finish") with the double negation of οὐ μή (oū mē, "not") makes the most sense grammatically in an ultimate redemptive context, e.g., "the disciples will not have come to the end of the towns of Israel before the parousia breaks upon them." 34
6. Hermeneutically and theologically, it allows for the phrase "shall not finish the cities of Israel until" to be taken in a qualitative sense in full harmony with Paul's later unambiguous writings about Israel's redemptive future in Rom 11:1-2, 25-32.
7. It does not require calling an A.D. 70 "non-coming" a "coming" as proposed by preterists.⁸ It allows for the gospel to reach the Gentiles (cf. Matt 28:19; Mark 13:10) without God forsaking Israel salvifically. Christ intended to communicate that what began redemptively for Israel at Christ's first advent (Matt 1:21) would be continued until He returns at His second advent."

—— Richard L. Mayhue, *Jesus: A Preterist or a Futurist*, TMSJ 14/1 (Spring 2003), 17-18.

"A futuristic interpretation of "coming" in Matt 10:23 is contextually, grammatically, hermeneutically, and theologically

more reasonable than the other views.”

—— Richard L. Mayhue, *Jesus: A Preterist or a Futurist*, TMSJ 14/1 (Spring 2003), 18.

“What, then, does the saying mean in this context? It means, simply, that the evangelisation of Israel will not be completed before the end of the present age, which comes with the advent of the Son of man.... Paul, from his own perspective, expresses much the same hope when he foresees the salvation of ‘all Israel’, the sequel of the ingathering of the full tale of Gentile believers, being consummated at the time when ‘the Deliverer will come from Zion’ (Rom. 11:25-27).”

—— F.F. Bruce, *Hard Sayings* 109.

“These explanations ignore the fact that in the other Matthew passages in which the coming of the Son of man is mentioned and described the reference is linked with the second coming. It is a coming “in the glory of his Father,” “with his angels,” “to render to every man according to his deed” (16:27, 28); a coming when Christ shall “sit on the throne of his glory” (19:28); a coming that will be “visible” (24:27); “sudden and unexpected” (24:37.39.44); a coming “on clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (24:30; cf. 25:31; 26:64). It would be strange therefore if from 10:23 any reference to Christ’s exaltation which attains its climax in the second coming would be wholly excluded. . . . The destruction of Jerusalem is predicted not here in chapter 10 but in 22:7; 23:38; see also 24:2,15f.”

—— William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 466-467.

“The historic church has understood this verse as referring to the Lord’s second advent.”

—— Brock Hollett, *Debunking Preterism: How Over-Realized Eschatology Misses the Not Yet of Bible Prophecy*, Kindle, (Morris Publishing, 2018), Location 3321.