

Matthew: 24:3–35

From Catena Aurea:

3. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

4. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

5. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

CHRYSOSTOM. They asked Him in private, because they were great things about which they were going to ask Him. They wished to know the day of His coming, for the vehement desire they had to see His glory.

JEROME. They ask Him three things. First, The time of the destruction of Jerusalem, saying, Tell us when shall these things be? Secondly, The time of Christ's coming, saying, And what shall be the sign of Thy coming? Thirdly, The time of the consummation of this world, saying, And of the end of the world?

CHRYSOSTOM. Luke speaks of one enquiry, that concerning Jerusalem, as though the disciples supposed that Christ's coming should be then, and the end of the world should be when Jerusalem should be destroyed. Whereas Mark does not state them all to have asked concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but Peter, James, John, and Andrew, as having more bold and free speech with Christ.

ORIGEN. I think Mount Olivet to be a mystery of the Church out of the Gentiles.

ORIGEN. For the husbandman dwelling on Mount Olivet is the word of God confirmed in the Church, that is, Christ, who ever grafts the branches of the wild olive on the good olive tree of the Fathers. They who have confidence before Christ, seek to learn the sign of the coming of Christ, and of the consummation of this world. And the coming of the Word into the soul is of two sorts. The first is that foolish preaching concerning Christ, when we preach that Christ was born and crucified; the second its coming in perfect men, concerning which it is said, We speak wisdom among them that are perfect; (1 Cor. 2:6.) and to this second coming is added the end of the world in the perfect man to whom the world is crucified.

HILARY. And because the questions of the disciples are threefold, they are separated by different times and meanings. That concerning the destruction of the city is first answered, and is then confirmed by truth of doctrine, that no seducer might prevail with the ignorant.

CHRYSOSTOM. His first answer is neither concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, nor concerning His second coming, but concerning the evils which were to be immediately encountered.

JEROME. One of them of whom The speaks was Simon of Samaria, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that he gave himself out to be the great Power, leaving these things written in his works among others, I am the Word of God, I am the Almighty, I am all things of God. The Apostle John also in his Epistle, Ye have heard that Antichrist shall come; even now there are many Antichrists. (1 John 2:18.) I suppose all heresiarchs to be Antichrists, and under the name of Christ to teach those things which are contrary to Christ. No wonder if we see some led away by such teachers, when the Lord has said, And shall deceive many.

ORIGEN. They that are deceived are many, because wide is the gate that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. (Mat. 7:13.) This one thing is enough to detect the Antichrists and seducers that they shall say, I am Christ, which Christ Himself is no where read to have said: for the works of God, and the word which He taught, and His power, were enough to produce belief that He is Christ. For every discourse which professes to expound Scripture faithfully, and has not the truth, is Antichrist. For the truth is Christ, that which feigns itself to be the truth is Antichrist. So also all virtues are Christ, all that feigns itself to be virtue is Antichrist; for Christ has in Himself in truth all manner of good for the edification of men, but the devil has forged resemblances of the same for the deceiving of the saints. We have need therefore of God to help us, that none deceive us, neither word nor power. It is a bad thing to find any one erring in his course of life; but I esteem it much worse not to think according to the most true rule of Scripture.

24:6–8

6. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

8. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

AUGUSTINE. (Ep. 199. 25.) To this enquiry of the disciples the Lord makes answer, declaring all things which were to come to pass from that time forwards, whether relating to the destruction of Jerusalem, which had given occasion to their enquiry; or to His coming through the Church, in which He ceases not to come to the end of time; for He is acknowledged as coming among His own, while new members are daily born to Him; or relating to the end itself when He shall appear to judge the quick and the dead. When then He describes the signs which shall attend these three events, we must carefully consider which signs belong to which events, lest perchance we refer to one that which belongs to another.

CHRYSOSTOM. Here He speaks of the battles which should be fought at Jerusalem; when He says, Ye shall hear wars, and rumours of wars.

ORIGEN. To hear the shouts raised in the battles, is to hear wars; to hear rumours of wars, is to hear accounts of wars waged afar off.

CHRYSOSTOM. And because this might alarm the disciples, He continues, See that ye be not troubled. And because they supposed that the end of the world would follow immediately after the war in which Jerusalem should be destroyed, He corrects their suspicions concerning this, These things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

JEROME. That is, Think not that the day of judgment is at hand, but that it is reserved against another time; the sign of which is plainly put in what follows, For nation shall rise against-nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

CHRYSOSTOM. And to shew that He also should fight against the Jews, He tells them not only of wars, but of calamities inflicted by Providence, And there shall be pestilences, and famines, and earthquakes in divers places.

CHRYSOSTOM. And these things shall not happen according to the order of nature before established among men, but shall come of wrath from heaven, and therefore He said not that they should come only, or come suddenly, but adds significantly, These all are the beginnings of troubles, that is, of the Jewish troubles.

ORIGEN. Or otherwise; As the body sickens before the death of the man, so it must needs be that before the consummation of this world the earth should be shaken, as though it were palsied, with frequent earthquakes, the air should gather a deadly quality and become pestilential, and that the vital energy of the soil should fail, and its fruits wither. And by consequence of this scarcity, men are stirred up to robbery

and war. But because war and strife arise sometimes from covctousness, and sometimes from desire of power and empty glory, of these which shall happen before the end of the world a yet deeper cause shall be assignable. For as Christ's coming brought through His divine power peace to divers nations, so it shall be on the other hand, that when iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold, and God and His Christ shall desert them; wars shall be again when actions which beget wars are not hindered by holiness; and hostile powers when they are not restrained by the Saints and by Christ shall work unchecked in the hearts of men, stirring up nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. But if, as some will have it, famine and pestilence are from the Angels of Satan, these shall then gather might from opposite powers, when the salt of the earth, and the lights of the world, Christ's disciples, shall be no longer, destroying those things which the malice of dæmons hatches. Ofttimes in Israel famines and pestilences were caused by sin, and removed by the prayers of the Saints. (1 Kings 17:1. Jer. 14. James 5:17, 18.) Well is that said, In divers places, for God will not destroy the whole race of men at once, but judging them in portions, He gives opportunity of repentance. But if some stop be not put to these evils in their commencement, they will progress to worse, as it follows, These all are the beginnings of sorrows, that is, sorrows common to the whole world, and those which are to come upon the wicked who shall be tormented in most sharp pains.

JEROME. Figuratively; Kingdom rising against kingdom and pestilence of that discourse which spreadeth as a plague-spot, and hunger of hearing the word of God, and commotion throughout the earth, and separation from the true faith, my be rather understood of the heretics, who fighting among themselves give the victory to the Church.

ORIGEN. This must come to pass before we can see the perfection of that wisdom which is in Christ; but not yet shall be that end which we seek, for a peaceful end is far from those men.

JEROME. These all are the beginnings of sorrows, is better understood of pains of labour, as it were the conception of the coming of Antichrist, and not of the birth.

24:9–14

9. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

10. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

11. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

12. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

14. And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

CHRYSOSTOM. Or otherwise; The disciples when they heard these things which were spoken of Jerusalem might suppose that they should be beyond reach of harm, as though what they now heard was the sufferings of others, while they themselves should meet with nothing but prosperous times, He therefore announces the grievous things which should befall them, putting them in fear for themselves. First He had bid them be on their guard against the arts of false teachers, He now foretells to them the violence of tyrants. In good season He thus introduces their own woes, as here they will receive consolation from the common calamities; and He held out to them not this comfort only, but also that of the cause for which they should suffer, shewing that it was for His name's sake, And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

ORIGEN. But how should the people of Christ be hated by the nations who dwelt in the uttermost parts of the earth? But one may perhaps say, that in this place all is put hyperbolically for many. But this that He says, Then shall they deliver you, presents some difficulty; for before these things the Christians were delivered to tribulation. To this it may be answered, that at that time the Christians shall be more delivered to tribulation than ever. And persons in any misfortune love to examine into the origin of them, and to talk about them. Hence when the worship of the Gods shall be almost deserted by reason of the multitude of Christians, it will be said that that is the cause of the wars, and famines, and pestilences; and of the earthquakes also they will say that the Christians are the cause, whence the persecution of the Churches.

CHRYSOSTOM. Having named two sources of opposition, that from seducers, and that from enemies, He adds a third, that from false brethren; And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. See Paul bewailing these same things, Without were fightings, within were fears; (2 Cor. 7:5. 2 Cor. 11:26. v. 13.) and in another place; In perils among false brethren, of whom he says, Such are false Apostles, deceitful workers.

HILARY. Such was Nicolaus, one of the seven deacons, who led astray many by his pretences. And Simon Magus who, armed with diabolic works and words, perverted many by false miracles.

CHRYSOSTOM. And He adds, what is still more cruel, that such false Prophets shall have no alleviation in charity; Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

JEROME. Observe, He says, the love of many, (Rom. 8:35.) not 'of all,' for in the Apostles, and those like them, love would continue, as Paul speaks, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

CHRYSOSTOM. Then that they should not say, How then shall we live among so many evils? He promises not only that they should live, but that they should teach every where. And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world.

CHRYSOSTOM. That before the taking of Jerusalem the Gospel was preached every where, hear what Paul says, Their sound is gone out into all the earth; (Rom. 10:18.) and see himself travelling from Jerusalem into Spain. And if one had so large a province, think how much all must have done. Whence writing to certain, he says of the Gospel, It bears fruit, and increases in every creature under heaven. (Col. 1:6.) And this is the strongest proof of Christ's power, that in thirty years or a little more, the word of the Gospel filled the ends of the world. Though the Gospel was preached every where, yet all did not believe, whence He adds, For a witness unto all nations, in accusation, that is, of such as believe not, they who have believed bearing witness against them that believed not, and condemning them. And in fit season did Jerusalem fall, namely, after the Gospel had been preached throughout the world; as it follows, And then shall the consummation come, i. e. the end of Jerusalem. For they who have seen Christ's power shining forth every where, and in brief space spread over the whole world, what mercy did they deserve when they continued still in ingratitude?

JEROME. And the sign of the Lord's second coming is, that the Gospel shall be preached in all the world, so that all may be without excuse.

ORIGEN. And that, Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake, might be then applied thus; That indeed at this time all nations are conspired together against the Christians, but that when the things foretold by Christ shall have come to pass, then there shall be persecutions, not as before in places, but every where against the people of God.

AUGUSTINE. (Ep. 199, 46.) But that this preaching the Gospel of the kingdom in all the world was accomplished by the Apostles, we have not any certain evidence, to prove. There are numberless barbarous nations in Africa, among whom the Gospel is not even yet preached, as it is easy to learn from the prisoners who are brought from thence. But it cannot be said that these have no part in the promise

of God. For God promised with an oath not the Romans only, but all nations to the seed of Abraham. But in whatever nation there is yet no Church established, it must needs be that there should be one, not that all the people should believe; for how then should that be fulfilled, Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake, unless there be in all nations those who hate and those; who are hated? That preaching therefore was not accomplished by the Apostles, while as yet there were nations among whom it had not begun to be fulfilled. The words of the Apostle also, Their sound hath gone out into all the world, though expressed as of time past, are meant to apply to something future, not yet completed; as the Prophet, whose words he quotes, said that the Gospel bore fruit and grew in the whole world (Ps. 19:4.), to shew thereby to what extent its growth should come. If then we know not when it shall be that the whole world shall be filled with the Gospel, undoubtedly we know not when the end shall be; but it shall not be before such time.

ORIGEN. When every nation shall have heard the preaching of the Gospel, then shall come the end of the world. For at this time there are many nations, not of barbarians only, but of our own, who have not yet heard the word of Christianity.

GLOSS. (non occ.)c. But it is possible to maintain both applications of the passage, if only we will take this diffusion of Gospel preaching in a double sense. If we understand it of fruit produced by the preaching, and the foundation in every nation of a Church of believers in Christ, as Augustine (in the passage above quoted) expounds it, then it is a sign which ought to precede the end of the world, and which did not precede the destruction of Jerusalem. But if we understand it of the fame of their preaching, then it was accomplished before the destruction of Jerusalem, when Christ's disciples had been dispersed over the four quarters of the earth. Whence Jerome says, (Hieron. in loc.) I do not suppose that there remained any nation which knew not the name of Christ; for where preacher had never been, some notion of the faith must have been communicated by neighbouring nations.

ORIGEN. Morally; He who shall see that glorious second coming of the word of God into his soul, must needs suffer in proportion to the measure of his proficiency assaults of opposing influences, and Christ in him must be hated by all, not only by the nations literally understood, but by the nations of spiritual vices. And in such enquiries there will be few who shall reach the truth with any fulness, the more part shall be offended and fall therefrom, betraying and accusing one another because of their disagreement respecting doctrines, which shall give rise to a mutual hatred. Also there shall be many setting forth unsound words concerning things to come, and interpreting the Prophets in a manner in which they ought not; these are the false Prophets who shall deceive many, and who shall cause to wax cold that fervour of

love which was before in the simplicity of the faith. But he who can abide firmly in the Apostolic tradition, he shall be saved; and the Gospel being preached to the minds of all shall be for a testimony to all nations, that is, to all the unbelieving thoughts of the soul.

24:15–22

15. When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

16. Then let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains:

17. Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house.

18. Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.

19. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

20. But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:

21. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

CHRYSOSTOM. As above He had obscurely intimated the end of Jerusalem; He now proceeds to a more plain announcement of it, citing a prophecy which should make them believe it.

JEROME. That, Let him that readeth understand, is said to call us to the mystic understanding of the place. What we read in Daniel is this; And in the midst of the week the sacrifice and the oblation shall be taken away, and in the temple shall be the abomination of desolations until the consummation of the time, and consummation shall be given upon the desolate. (Dan. 9:27. sec. LXX.)

AUGUSTINE. (Ep. 199. 31.) Luke, in order to shew that the abomination of desolation foretold by Daniel had reference to the time of the siege of Jerusalem, repeats these words of our Lord, When ye shall see Jerusalem encompassed by armies, then know ye that its desolation draweth nigh. (Luke 21:20.)

JEROME. Or it may be understood of the statue of Cæsar, which Pilate set up in the temple; or of the equestrian statue of Adrian, which stood to the present time in the very Holy of Holies. For, according to

the Old Scripture, an idol is called 'abomination;' of desolation is added, because the idol was set up in the desolated and deserted temple.

CHRYSOSTOM. Or because he who desolated the city and the temple placed his statue there. He says, When ye shall see, because these things were to happen while some of them were yet alive. Wherein admire Christ's power, and the courage of the disciples, who preached through those times in which all things Jewish were the object of attack. The Apostles, being Jews, introduced new laws in opposition to the Roman authority. The Romans conquered countless thousands of Jews, but could not overcome twelve unarmed unprotected men.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lxxvi.) But because it had often happened to the Jews to be recovered in very desperate circumstances, as in the times of Sennacherib and Antiochus, that no man might look for any such event now, He gave command to His disciples to fly, saying, Then let them which are in Judæa flee to the mountains.

CHRYSOSTOM. Then to shew how inevitable the evils that should come upon the Jews, and how infinite their calamity, He adds, And let him which is on the housetop, not come down to take any thing out of his house, for it was better to be saved, and to lose his clothes, than to put on a garment and perish; and of him who is in the field He says the same. For if those who are in the city fly from it, little need is there for those who are abroad to return to the city. But it is easy to despise money, and not hard to provide other raiment; but how can one avoid natural circumstances? How can a woman with child be made active for flight, or how can she that gives suck desert the child she has brought forth? Woe, therefore, to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days; to the one, because they are encumbered, and cannot easily fly, bearing about the burden of the womb; to the other, because they are held by compassion for their children, and cannot save with them those whom they are suckling.

ORIGEN. Or because that will not be a time of shewing pity, neither upon them who are with child, nor upon them who are suckling, nor upon their infants. And as speaking to Jews who thought they might travel no more upon the sabbath than a sabbath-day's journey, He adds, But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath.

JEROME. Because in the one the severity of the cold prevents your flight to the deserts, and your lurking in mountains and wilds; in the other, you must either transgress the Law, if you will fly, or encounter instant death if you will stay.

CHRYSOSTOM. Note how this speech is directed against the Jews; for when these things were done by Vespasian, the Apostles could neither observe the Sabbath nor fly, seeing most of them were already dead, and those who survived were living in distant countries. And why they should pray for this He adds a reason, For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor shall be.

AUGUSTINE. (Ep. 199. 30.) In Luke it is thus read, There shall be great distress upon the earth, and wrath upon this people, and they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations. (Luke 21:23.) And so Josephus, who wrote the Jewish History, (B. J. vii.) relates evils so great happening to this people as to seem hardly credible. Whence it was not unreasonably said, that such tribulation had never been from the beginning of creation, nor should be; for though in the lime of Antichrist shall be such, or perhaps greater; yet to the Jews, of whom we must understand this, such shall never more befall. For if they shall be the first and the chief to receive Antichrist, they will then rather inflict than suffer tribulation.

CHRYSOSTOM. I ask the Jews, whence came upon them so grievous wrath from heaven more woful than all that had come upon them before? Plainly it was because of the desperate crime¹ and the denial of the Cross. But He shews that they deserved still heavier punishment than they received, when He adds, And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; that is, If the siege by the Romans should be continued longer, all the Jews would perish; for by all flesh, He means all the Jewish nation, those within and those without; for the Romans were at war not only with those in Judæa, but with the whole race wherever dispersed.

AUGUSTINE. Indeed some persons seem to me not unfitly to understand by these days the evils themselves, as in other places of divine Scripture evil days are spoken of; not that the days themselves are evil, but the things that are done on them. And they are said to be shortened, because they are less felt, God giving us endurance; so that even though grievous, they are felt as short.

CHRYSOSTOM. But that the Jews should not say that these evils came because of the preaching and the disciples of Christ, He shews them that had it not been for His disciples, they would have totally perished, but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

AUGUSTINE. For we ought not to doubt that when Jerusalem was overthrown, there were among that people elect of God who had believed out of the circumcision, or would have believed, elect before the foundation of the world, for whose sake those days should be shortened, and their evils made endurable.

Some there are who suppose that the days will be shortened by a more rapid motion of the sun, as the day was made longer on the prayer of Jesus Naue.

JEROME. Not remembering that which is written. The day continues according to thy ordinances. (Ps. 119:91.) We must understand it of their being shortened not in measure, but in number, lest the faith of believers should be shaken by lengthened affliction.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) For let us not suppose that the computation of Daniel's weeks was interfered with by this shortening of those days, or that they were not already at that time complete, but had to be completed afterwards in the end of all things, for Luke most plainly testifies that the prophecy of Daniel was accomplished at the time when Jerusalem was overthrown.

CHRYSOSTOM. Observe this economy of the Holy Spirit in this, that John wrote nothing of all this, that he might not seem to be writing a history after the event; for he survived sometime the taking of Jerusalem. But these who died before it, and saw nothing of it, these write it, that the power of prophecy may shine manifestly forth.

HILARY. Or otherwise; It is a sign of His future coming that the Lord gives, when He says, When ye shall see the abomination. For the Prophet spoke this of the times of Antichrist; and he calls abomination that which coming against God claims to itself the honour of God. It is the abomination of desolation, because it will desolate the earth with wars and slaughter; and it is admitted by the Jews, and set up in the holy place, that where God had been invoked by the prayers of the saints, into that same place admitted by the unbelievers it might be adored with the worship of God. And because this error will be peculiar to the Jews, that having rejected the truth they should adopt a lie, He warns them to leave Judæa, and flee to the mountains, that no pollution or infection might be gathered by admixture with a people who should believe on Antichrist. That He says, Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house, is thus understood. The roof is the highest part of the house, the summit and perfection of the whole building. He then who stands on the top of his house, i. e. in the perfection of his heart, aloft in the regeneration of a new spirit, ought not to come down to the lower desire of things of the world. Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his coat; i. e. He that has attained to obedience to the command, let him not return back to his former cares, to take on him again the coat of his former sins in which he once was clothed.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) For in tribulations we must beware of coming down from the spiritual heights, and yielding ourselves to the carnal life; or of failing and looking behind us, after having made some progress forwards.

HILARY. That which is said, Woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, is not to be taken literally as an admonition to women pregnant, but as a description of souls burdened with the weight of sin, that neither in the house, nor in the field, may escape the storm of the wrath that is in store for them. Woe also to those that are being suckled; the weak souls, that is, who are being brought to the knowledge of God as by milk, to whom it shall be woe, because they are too laden to fly, and too inexperienced to resist Antichrist, having neither escaped sin, nor partaken of the food of true bread.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. I. 37.) That no one be found in that day in either joy or sorrow for temporal things.

HILARY. Or; That we be not taken in the frost of sins, or in discontinuance of good works, because of the soreness of the affliction; notwithstanding that for the sake of God's elect, those days shall be shortened, that the abridgment of the time may disarm the force of the calamities.

ORIGEN. Mystically; In the holy place of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, Antichrist, that is, false word, has often stood; let those who see this flee from the Judæa of the letter to the high mountains of truth. And whoso has been found to have gone up to the house-top of the word, and to be standing upon its summit, let him not come down thence as though he would fetch any thing out of his house. And if he be in the field in which the treasure is hid, and return thence to his house, he will run into the temptation of a false word; but especially if he have stripped off his old garment, that is, the old man, and should have returned again to take it up. Then the soul, as it were with child by the word, not having yet brought forth, is liable to a woe; for it casts that which it had conceived, and loses that hope which is in the acts of truth; and the same also if the word has been brought forth perfect and entire, but not having yet attained sufficient growth. Let them that flee to the mountains pray that their flight be not in the winter or on the sabbath-day, because in the serenity of a settled spirit they may reach the way of salvation, but if the winter overtake them they fall amongst those whom they would fly from. And there be some who rest from evil works, but do not good works; be your flight then not on such sabbath when a man rests from good works, for no man is easily overcome in times of peril from false doctrines, except he is unprovided with good works. But what sorer affliction is there than to see our brethren deceived, and to feel one's self shaken and terrified? Those days mean the precepts and dogmas of truth; and all

interpretations coming of science falsely so called (1 Tim. 6:20.) are so many additions to those days, which God shortens by those whom He wills.

24:23–28

23. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

24. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

25. Behold, I have told you before.

26. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

27. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

28. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

CHRYSOSTOM. When the Lord had finished all that related to Jerusalem, He came in the rest to His own coming, and gives them signs thereof, useful not for them only, but for us and for all who shall be after us. As above, the Evangelist said, In those days came John the Baptist, (Mat. 3:1.) not implying immediately after what had gone before, but thirty years after; so here, when He says Then, He passes over the whole interval of time between the taking of Jerusalem and the beginnings of the consummation of the world. Among the signs which He gives of His second coming He certifies them concerning the place, and the deceivers. For it shall not be then as at His former coming, when He appeared in Bethlehem, in a corner of the world, unknown of any; but He shall come openly so as not to need any to announce His approach, wherefore, If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe not.

JEROME. Wherein He shews that His second coming shall be not in lowliness as His first, but in glory; and therefore it is folly to seek in places little and obscure for Him who is the Light of the whole world. (John 8:12.)

HILARY. Notwithstanding, by reason of the great tribulation in which men shall be cast, false prophets promising to shew aid present from Christ, will falsely affirm that Christ is present in divers places, that they may draw into the service of Antichrist men discouraged and distracted.

CHRYSOSTOM. He speaks here of Antichrist, and of certain his ministers, whom He calls false Christs and false prophets, such as were many in the time of the Apostles; but before Christ's second coming there shall come others more bitter than the former, And they shall shew great signs and wonders. (cf. 2 Thes. 2:8.)

AUGUSTINE. (Lib. 83 Quæst. q. 79.) Here the Lord forewarns us that even wicked men shall do some miracles which the saints cannot do, yet are they not therefore to be thought to have a higher place in the sight of God. For the Egyptian magi were not more acceptable to God than the people of Israel, because they could do what the Israelites could not; yet did Moses, by the power of God, work greater things. This gift is not bestowed on all the saints, lest the weak should be led astray by a most destructive error, supposing such powers to be higher gifts than those works of righteousness by which eternal life is secured. And though magi do the same miracles that the saints do, yet are they done with a different end, and through a different authority; for the one do them seeking the glory of God, the others seeking their own glory; these do them by some special compact or privilege¹ granted to the Powers, within their sphere, those by the public dispensation and the command of Him to whom all creation is subject.^f For it is one thing for the owner of a horse to be compelled to give it up to a soldier, another for him to hand it over to a purchaser, or to give or lend it to a friend; and as those evil soldiers, who are condemned by the imperial discipline, employ the imperial ensigns to terrify the owners of any property, and to extort from them what is not required by the public service; so some evil Christians, by means of the name of Christ, or by words or sacraments Christian, compel somewhat from the Powers; yet these, when thus at the bidding of evil men, they depart from their purpose, they depart in order to deceive men in whose wanderings they rejoice. It is one way then in which magi, another in which good Christians, another in which bad Christians, work miracles; the magi by a private compact, good Christians by the public righteousness, evil Christians by the signs of public righteousness. ¹And we ought not to wonder at this when we believe not unreasonably that all that we see happen is wrought by the agency of the inferior powers of this air.

AUGUSTINE. (de Trin. iii. 8.) Yet are we not therefore to think that this visible material world attends the nod of the disobedient angels, but rather the power is given them of God. Nor are we to suppose that such evil angels have creative power, but by their spirituality they know the seeds of things which are hidden from us, and these they secretly scatter by suitable adaptations of the elements, and so they give occasion both to the whole being, and the more rapid increase of substances. For so there are many men who know what sort of creatures use to be generated out of certain herbs, meats, juices and humours,

bruised and mingled together in a certain fashion; save only that it is harder for men to do these things, inasmuch as they lack that subtlety of sense, and penetrativeness of body in their limbs dull and of earthly mould.

ORIGEN. That, If it were possible, is spoken hyperbolically; not that the elect can be led astray, but He wishes to shew that the discourse of heretics is often so persuasive, as to have force to prevail even with those who act² wisely.

HILARY. The false prophets, of whom He had spoken above, shall say of Christ one while, Lo, He is in the desert, in order that they may cause men to wander astray; another while, Lo, He is in the secret chambers, that they may enthral men under the dominion of Antichrist. But the Lord declares Himself to be neither lurking in a remote corner, nor shut up to be visited singly, but that He shall be exhibited to the view of all, and in every place, As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.

CHRYSOSTOM. As He had above described in what guise Antichrist should come, so here He describes how He Himself shall come. For as the lightning needeth none to herald or announce it, but is in an instant of time visible throughout the whole world, even to those that are sitting in their chambers, so the coming of Christ shall be seen every where at once, because of the brightness of His glory. Another sign He adds of His coming, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together. The eagles denote the company of the Angels, Martyrs, and Saints.

JEROME. By an instance from nature, which we daily see, we are instructed in a sacrament of Christ. Eagles and vultures are said to scent dead bodies even beyond sea, and to flock to feed upon them. If then birds, not having the gift of reason, by instinct alone find out where lays a dead body, separated by so great space of country, how much more ought the whole multitude of believers to hasten to Christ, whose lightning goeth forth out of the east, and shines even to the west? We may understand by the carcase here, or corpse¹, which in the Latin is more expressively 'cadaver,' an allusion to the passion of Christ's death.

HILARY. That we might not be ignorant of the place in which He should come, He adds this, Wheresoever the carcase, &c. He calls the Saints eagles, from the spiritual flight of their bodies, and shews that their gathering shall be to the place of His passion, the Angels guiding them thither; and rightly should we look for His coming in glory there, where He wrought for us eternal glory by the suffering of His bodily humiliation.

ORIGEN. And observe, He says not vultures or crows, but eagles, shewing the lordliness and royalty of all who have believed in the Lord's passion.

JEROME. They are called eagles whose youth is renewed as the eagle's, and who take to themselves wings that they may come to Christ's passion. (Ps. 103:5. Is. 40:31.)

JEROME. Or otherwise; This may be understood of the false prophets. At the time of the Jewish captivity, there were many leaders who declared themselves to be Christs, (Joseph B.J. v. 1) so that while the Romans were actually besieging them, there were three factions within. But it is better taken as we expounded it above, of the end of the world. Thirdly, it may be understood of the warfare of the heretics against the Church, and of those Antichrists, who under pretext of false science, fight against Christ.

ORIGEN. The genus of Antichrist is one, the species many, just as all lies are of one sort. As all the holy Prophets were Prophets of the true Christ, so understand that each false Christ shall have his own false Prophets, who shall preach as true the false teachings of some Antichrist. When then one shall say, Lo, here is Christ, or lo, there, we need not look abroad out of the Scriptures, for out of the Law, the Prophets, and the Apostles, they bring the things which seem to favour their lie. Or by this, Lo, here is Christ, or lo, there, they shew that it was not Christ, but some impostor under the same title, such for example as Marcion, or Valentinus, or Basilides taught.

JEROME. If then any one assert to you that Christ tarries in the desert of the Gentiles, or in the teaching of the Philosophers, or in the secret chambers of the heretics, who promise the hidden things of God, believe Him not, but believe that the Catholic Faith shines from east to west in the Churches.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 38.) By the east and west, He signifies the whole world, throughout which the Church should be. In the same way as He said below, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, (Mat. 26:64.) so now He likens His coming to lightning, which uses to flash out of the clouds. When then the authority of the Church is set up clear and manifest throughout the whole world, He suitably warns His disciples that they should not believe schismatics and heretics. Each schism and heresy holds its own place, either occupying some important position in the earth, or ensnaring men's curiosity in obscure and remote conventicles. Lo, here is Christ, or lo, there, refers to some district or province of the earth; the secret chambers, or the desert, signify the obscure and lurking conventicles of heretics.

JEROME. Or by this, in the desert, or in the secret chambers, He means that in times of persecution and distress, the false Prophets always find place for deceiving.

ORIGEN. Or, when they allege secret and before unpublished Scriptures, in proof of their lie, they seem to say, Lo, the word of truth is in the desert. But when they produce canonical Scripture in which all Christians agree, they seem to say, Lo, the word of truth is in the chambers. Or wishing to point out such discourses as are altogether without Scripture, He said, If they shall say to you, Lo, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not. Truth is like the lightning that cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west. Or this may mean, that truth can be supported out of every passage of Scripture. The lightning of truth comes out of the east, that is, from the first beginnings of Christ, and shines throughout even to His passion, which is His setting; or from the very beginning of creation, to the last Scripture of the Apostles. Or, the east is the Law, the west is the end of the Law, and of John's prophecy. The Church alone neither takes away word or meaning from this lightning, nor adds aught to its prophecy. Or He means that we should give no heed to those who say, Lo, here is Christ, but shew Him not in the Church, in which alone is the coming of the Son of Man, who said, Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. (Mat. 28:20.)

JEROME. We are invited to flock to Christ's passion wheresoever in Scripture it is read of, that through it we may be able to come to God's word.

24:29–30

29. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

30. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn.

GLOSS. (non occ.) As soon as the Lord has fortified the believers against the arts of Antichrist and his ministers, by shewing that His coming would be public, He proceeds to shew the order and method of His coming.

CHRYSOSTOM. By the tribulation, He means the times of Antichrist and the false Prophets; for when there are so many deceivers, the tribulation will be great. But it shall not extend through any great length of time. For if for the elect's sake the Jewish war is shortened, much more shall this tribulation be shortened

for their sakes; for which reason He said not After, but Immediately after, for He shall come immediately after.

HILARY. The darkening of the sun, the failing of the moon, and the fall of the stars, indicate the glories of His coming.

ORIGEN. One will say, As at the breaking out of great conflagrations, great darkness is at the first caused by the smoke, so when the world shall be consumed by fire, which shall be kindled, even the great luminaries shall be darkened; and when the light of the stars is decayed, the rest of their substance, incapable of exaltation, shall fall from heaven into what it was, when it was first raised aloft by the light. When this shall have taken place, it follows that the rational heavenly powers shall suffer dismay and derangement, and shall be suspended from their functions. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, that sign by which the heavenly things were made, that is, the power which the Son wrought when He hung upon the cross. And the sign shall appear in heaven, that men of all tribes who before had not believed Christianity when preached, then by that sign, acknowledging it as made plain, shall grieve and mourn for their ignorance and sins. Others will think otherwise, that as the light of a lamp dies away by degrees, so when the supply of the heavenly luminaries shall fail, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon and the light of the stars shall grow dim, and that which in their composition is earthy shall fall from heaven. But how can it be said of the sun that its light shall be darkened, when Esaias the Prophet (Is. 30:26.) declares, that in the end of the world, there shall be light proceeding forth from the sun? And of the moon he declares that it shall be as the sun. But concerning the stars, there are some that endeavour to convince us that all, or many of them, are larger than the whole earth. How then shall they fall from heaven, when this earth would not be large enough to contain them?

JEROME. These things, therefore, shall not come to pass by any diminution of light, for in another place we read that the light of the sun shall be sevenfold; but by comparison with real light, all things shall seem dim.

JEROME. By the powers of heaven, we understand the bands of the Angels.

CHRYSOSTOM. Very fitly shall they be shaken and dismayed, seeing so mighty a change being wrought, their fellow-servants punished, and the universe standing before a terrible tribunal.

ORIGEN. But as, at the dispensation of the Cross, the sun was eclipsed, and darkness was spread over the earth; so when the sign of the Son of Man appears in heaven, the light of the sun, moon, and stars, shall

fail, as though waning before the might of that sign. This we understand to be the sign of the cross, that the Jews may see, as Zacharias and John speak, Him whom they have pierced, (Zech. 12:10. John 19:37.) and the sign of victory.

CHRYSOSTOM. But because the sun will be darkened, the cross would not be seen, if it were not far brighter than the rays of the sun. That the disciples might not be ashamed, and grieve over the cross, He speaks of it as a sign, with a kind of distinction. The sign of the cross will appear to overthrow the shamelessness of the Jews, when Christ shall appear in the judgment, shewing not only His wounds, but His most ignominious death, And then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn. For when they shall see the cross, they shall bethink them how they have gained nought by His death, and that they have crucified Him whom they ought to have worshipped.

JEROME. Rightly does He say, the tribes of the earth, for they shall mourn who have no citizenship in heaven, but are written in earth. (Jer. 17:13.)

ORIGEN. Morally, one may say that the sun, which shall be darkened, is the Devil, who shall be convicted in the end of the world, that whereas he is darkness, he has feigned himself to be the sun; the moon, which seems to receive its light from this sun, is the Church of the wicked, which professes to have and to give light, but then convicted with its sinful dogmas, shall lose its brightness; and all those who, either by false teaching, or false virtues, promised truth to men, but led them astray by lies, these are fitly called stars falling from, so to say, their own heaven, where they were raised on high, exalting themselves against the knowledge of God. For illustration of this discourse, we may apply that place in Proverbs, which says, The light of the just is unquenchable, but the light of the wicked shall be quenched. (Prov. 4:18.) Then the brightness of God shall appear in every one who has borne the image of the heavenly; and they of heaven shall rejoice, but they of earth shall lament.

AUGUSTINE. (Ep. 199, 39.) Or, the Church is the sun, moon, and stars, to which it is said, Fair as the moon, bright as the sun. Then shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light (Song of Solomon 6:10.), because in that ungoverned fury of wicked persecutors, the Church shall not be seen. Then shall the stars fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken, because many, who seemed to be shining in God's grace, shall give way to their persecutors, and shall fall, and even the stoutest believers shall be shaken. And these things shall be after the tribulation of those days, not because they shall happen when the whole persecution is overpast, but because the tribulation shall be first, that the falling

away may come after. And because it shall be so throughout all those days, it shall be after the tribulation of those days, yet on those very days.

And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

CHRYSOSTOM. He adds this, that having heard of the cross, they should not now imagine a similar degradation.

AUGUSTINE. (Ep. 199, 41.) The first and most apparent meaning of this is of that time when He shall come to judge the quick and the dead in His body—that body in which He sits at the right hand of the Father, in which He died and rose again and ascended into heaven. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles; He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight, (Acts 1:9.) upon which it was said by the Angels, He shall so come as ye have seen Him go into heaven, we may reasonably believe that He will come again, not only in the same body, but also in a cloud.

ORIGEN. Therefore shall they see with the bodily eyes the Son of Man, coming in human shape, in the clouds of heaven, that is, on high. As at the transfiguration, a voice came out of the cloud, so when He shall come again transformed into His glorious appearance, it shall be not on one cloud, but upon many, which shall be His chariot. And if when the Son of God went up to Jerusalem, they who loved Him spread their garments in the way, not willing that even the ass that carried Him should tread upon the earth; what wonder, if the Father and God of all should spread the clouds of heaven under the body of the Son, when He comes to the work of the consummation? And one may say, that as in the creation of man, God took clay from the earth and made man; so to manifest the glory of Christ, the Lord taking of the heaven, and of its substance, gave it a body of a bright cloud in the Transfiguration, and of bright clouds at the Consummation; wherefore it is here said, in the clouds of heaven, as it was there said, of the clay of the ground. (Gen. 2:7.) And it behoves the Father to give all such admirable gifts to the Son, because He humbled Himself; and He has also exalted Him, not only spiritually, but bodily, that He should come upon such clouds; and perhaps upon rational clouds, that even the chariot of the glorified Son of Man should not be irrational. At the first, Jesus came with that power with which He wrought signs and wonders in the people; yet was that power little in comparison of that great power with which He shall come in the end; for that was the power of one emptying Himself of power. And also, it is fitting that He should be transformed into greater glory than at the transfiguration on the mount; for then He was transfigured for the sake of three only, but in the consummation of the whole world, He shall appear in great glory, that all may see Him in glory.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) But because the Scriptures are to be searched, and we are not to content ourselves with the surface of them, let us look closely at what follows, When ye see all these things come to pass, know that he is near even at the door. We know then that He is near, when we see come to pass not any of the foregoing things, but all of them, among which is this that the Son of Man shall be seen coming. And he shall send his Angels, who from the four quarters of the world shall gather together His elect. All these things He does at the last hour (1 John 2:18.) coming in His members as in the clouds, or in the whole Church as in one great cloud, as now He ceases not to come. And with great power and glory, because His power and glory will seem greater in the Saints to whom He will give great power, that they may not be overcome of persecution.

ORIGEN. Or He comes every day with great power to the mind of the believer in the clouds of prophecy, that is, in the Scriptures of the Prophets and the Apostles, who utter the word of God with a meaning above human nature. Also we say that to those who understand He comes with great glory, and that this is the more seen in the second coming of the Word which is to the perfect. 1And so it may be, that all which the three Evangelists have said concerning Christ's coming, if carefully compared together and thoroughly examined, would be found to apply to His continual daily coming in His body, which is the Church, of which coming He said in another place, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven, (Mat. 26:6.) excepting those places in which He promises that His last coming in His own person.

24:31

31. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

ORIGEN. Because He had spoken of mourning, which shall be only that they may bear witness against themselves and condemn themselves, that none should suppose that that mourning will end their woes, He now adds, And he shall send his Angels with a trump and a loud voice.

CHRYSOSTOM. The sound of the trump refers to the resurrection, and the rejoicing, and to represent the astonishment which shall be then, and the woe of those that shall be left, and shall not be snatched up into the clouds.

ORIGEN. It is written in Numbers (Numb. 10:3.), that the Priests shall summon by the sound of the trumpet from the four winds those who are of the camp of Israel, and it is in allusion to this that Christ speaks here of the Angels, And they shall gather together the elect from the four winds.

ORIGEN. Some of little discernment think, that only those who shall then be found in the body shall be gathered together, but it is better to say that the Angels of Christ shall then gather together not only all who from the coming of Christ to the end of the world have been called and chosen, but all from the foundation of the world, who like Abraham have seen the day of Christ and rejoiced therein. (John 8:56.) And that He here means not only those that shall be found in the body, but those also who have quitted the body, the following words shew, from one end of heaven to the other, which cannot be meant of any one upon earth. Or, the heavens are the divine Scriptures and their authors¹ in which God dwells. One end of heaven is the beginning of the Scriptures, the other end is their conclusion. The saints there are gathered together from one end of heaven, that is, from those that live in the beginning of the Scriptures to those who live in the ends of them. They shall be gathered together with a trump and a loud voice, that they who hear and attend may prepare themselves for that way of perfection which leads to the Son of God.

CHRYSOSTOM. That the Lord calls His elect by His Angels pertains to the honour of the elect; and Paul also says that they shall be caught into the clouds; (1 Thes. 4:17.) that is, the Angels shall gather together those that have risen, and when they are gathered together, the clouds shall receive them.

24:32–35

32. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

33. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

34. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

35. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 77.) Because He had said that these things should come to pass immediately after the tribulation of those days, they might ask, How long time hence? He therefore gives them an instance in the fig

JEROME. As much as to say, When the tender shoots first shew themselves in the stem of the fig tree, and the bud bursts into flower, and the bark puts forth leaves, ye perceive the approach of summer and the season of spring and growth; so when ye shall see all these things that are written, do not suppose that the end of the world is immediate, but that certain monitory signs and precursors are shewing its approach.

CHRYSOSTOM. He shews that the interval of time shall not be great, but that the coming of Christ will be presently. By the comparison of the tree He signifies the spiritual summer and peace that the just shall enjoy after their winter, while sinners on the other hand shall have a winter after summer.

ORIGEN. As the fig has its vital powers torpid within it through the season of winter, but when that is past its branches become tender by those very powers and put forth leaves; so the world and all those who are saved had before Christ's coming their vital energies dormant within them as in a season of winter. Christ's Spirit breathing upon them makes the branches of their hearts soft and tender, and that which was dormant within burgeons into leaf, and makes shew of fruit. To such the summer and the coming of the glory of the Word of God is nigh at hand.

CHRYSOSTOM. This analogy also adds credit to His foregoing discourse; for wherever He speaks of what must by all means come to pass, Christ ever brings forward parallel physical laws.

AUGUSTINE. (Ep. 199, 22.) That now from the Evangelic and Prophetic signs that we see come to pass, we ought to look that the Lord's coming should be nigh, who is there that denies? For daily it draws ever more and more near, but of the exact time it is said, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons. (Acts 1:7.) See how long ago the Apostle said, Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. (Rom. 13:11.) What he spoke was not false, and yet how many years have elapsed, how much more may we not say that the Lord's coming is at hand now, that so great an accession of time has been made?

HILARY. Mystically; The Synagogue is likened to the fig tree; its branch is Antichrist, the son of the Devil, the portion of sin, the maintainer of the law; when this shall begin to swell and to put forth leaves, then summer is nigh, i. e. the approach of the day of judgment shall be perceived.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 39.) Or, by the fig tree understand the human race, by reason of the temptations of the flesh. When its branch is fender, i. e. when the sons of men through faith in Christ have progressed towards spiritual fruits, and the honour of their adoption to be the sons of God has shone forth in them.

HILARY. To give sure credit to the things which should come to pass He adds, Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away until all these things be fulfilled. By saying Verily, He gives asseveration to the truth.

ORIGEN. The uninstructed refer the words to the destruction of Jerusalem, and suppose them to have been said of that generation which saw Christ's death, that it should not pass away before the city should be destroyed. But I doubt that they would succeed in thus expounding every word from that, one stone shall not be left upon another, to that, it is even at the door; in some perhaps they would succeed, in others not altogether.

CHRYSOSTOM. All these things therefore mean what was said of the end of Jerusalem, of the false prophets, and the false Christs, and all the rest which shall happen down to the time of Christ's coming. That He said, This generation, He meant not of the men then living, but of the generation of the faithful; for so Scripture uses to speak of generations, not of time only, but of place, life, and conversation; as it is said, This is the generation of them that seek the Lord. (Ps. 24:6.) Herein He teaches that Jerusalem shall perish, and the greater part of the Jews be destroyed, but that no trial shall overthrow the generation of the faithful.

ORIGEN. Yet shall the generation of the Church survive the whole of this world, that it may inherit the world to come, yet it shall not pass away until all these things have come to pass. But when all these shall have been fulfilled, then not the earth only but the heavens also shall pass away; that is, not only the men whose life is earthy, and who are therefore called the earth, but also they whose conversation is in heaven, and who are therefore called the heaven; these shall pass away to things to come, that they may come to better things. But the words spoken by the Saviour shall not pass away, because they effect and shall ever effect their purpose; but the perfect and they that admit no further improvement, passing through what they are, come to that which they are not; and this is that, My words shall not pass away. And perhaps the words of Moses and the Prophets have passed away, because all that they prophesied has been fulfilled; but the words of Christ are always complete, daily fulfilling and to be fulfilled in the saints. Or perhaps we ought not to say that the words of Moses and the Prophets are once for all fulfilled; seeing they also are the words of the Son of God, and are fulfilled continually.

JEROME. Or, by generation here He means the whole human race, and the Jews in particular. And He adds, Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away, to confirm their faith in what

has gone before; as though He had said, it is easier to destroy things solid and immovable, than that ought should fail of my words.

HILARY. For heaven and earth have in their constitution no necessity of existence, but Christ's words derived from eternity have in them such virtue that they must needs abide.

JEROME. The heaven and the earth shall pass away by a change, not by annihilation; for how should the sun be darkened, and the moon not give her light, if earth and heaven in which these are should be no more?

CHRYSOSTOM. He brings forward the elements of the earth to shew that the Church is of more value than either heaven or earth, and that He is Maker of all things.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

24:3 What Will Be the Sign of Your Coming?

He Sat on the Mount of Olives.

Origen: I regard the allegory of the Mount of Olives to refer to the churches of the Gentiles, among whom olive trees were planted. Each church is able to say, "I am like a fruitful olive tree in the house of God." Perhaps also in this Mount of Olives, where the roots of good olive trees live, branches of a wild olive tree were grafted into the good tree in the place of those branches which had been "broken off for their unbelief." The farmer residing on the Mount of Olives is the Word of God as professed in the church, which is Christ, who continually grafts wild olive branches into the good tree of our father Moses and the other prophets, so that having been strengthened by the holy prophets (whose prophecies they understood to refer to Christ), these new branches might offer more abundant, richer fruit than the first olive branches, which had been cut off and made useless on account of the curse which was in the law. Commentary on Matthew 32.

The Disciples Came to Him Privately.

Chrysostom: Since they meant to inquire about confidential matters, the disciples came to him privately. They were deeply troubled about when the day of his coming would be. They eagerly desired to behold

that glory and the countless blessing that will accompany it. Yet they asked him two things. When will these things come to pass—especially the overturning of the temple? And what will be the sign of his coming at the close of the age? The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 75.1.

24:4–5 Do Not Be Led Astray

They Will Lead Many Astray.

Origen: Come up to the moral and spiritual sense of Scripture and see if you can discover an interpretation worthy of the excellence of the knowledge of Christ and of the discernment of the Evangelists, lest you denigrate the dignity of evangelical wisdom with a lesser interpretation. Let us see then if mindful of that which was handed down from above concerning him who said “Many will come in my name saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will seduce many,” we can interpret these things in accordance with their consequences. It is inevitable that everyone who has been made perfect and has been given to see the glorious coming of the Word in his soul, everyone who has destroyed, devoured and crucified the world so that all things worldly are dead to him, and has trained his mind for understanding, will eventually engage doctrinal battles in the course of his search and discernment. He will hear many voices from divergent traditions professing to have the truth. Like a good soldier of the Word, however, his soul shall remain safe from all those opponents of the truth who feign adherence to the truth. In this way, he will be made worthy to receive in his soul the glorious coming of Christ, the Word of God who was “in the beginning with God,” who comes to those who, having recognized him “according to the flesh” and having received the Word who “became flesh,” then ascended far beyond these things to behold no ordinary glory, but “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” Commentary on Matthew 35.

24:6 Wars and Rumors of Wars

24:7 Nation Will Rise Against Nation

24:8 All This is But the Beginning

Birth Pangs.

Chrysostom: By “wars and rumors of wars” he refers to the troubles that are coming upon them. They supposed after that war the end would come. But see how he warns them: “But the end is not yet. For

nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” He speaks of the preludes to the troubles of the Jews. “All this is but the beginning of the birth pangs,” that is, of the troubles that will befall them. “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death.” This was the season for being candid about what was to come, in order that they might strengthen one another in facing their common miseries. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 75.2.

24:9 Hated for My Name’s Sake

You Will Be Hated.

Chrysostom: Then he added, “And you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved.” This is the time of greatest evil, when the war becomes internal, for there are many false brothers.

Note that the war is coming from three sources simultaneously: from the deceivers, from the enemies, from the false brothers. Later Paul would lament over the same complications, saying that there were “fightings without, fears within” and “danger from false brothers.” Again he wrote, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 75.2.

24:10 Many Will Fall Away

Many Will Betray and Hate.

Origen: If we ought to understand this passage in the moral sense, in accordance with how we treated the passages above, then we will explain its meaning as follows. It is necessary that he who is about to see the glorious coming of the Word of God in his soul should, like a great athlete, suffer the snares of his enemies and be given over to afflictions insofar as they advance the perfection of the Word within him....

The manifestation of the qualities of Christ implanted in him, on account of which he is called a Christian, makes him an object of hatred to everyone who has the spirit of the world. This persecution also only tends more and more toward the perfection of the indwelling of Christ.

Few, however, will be left untouched by discussions and questions concerning the fullness of truth. Indeed, many will be “scandalized” and will fall on account of it, having been made betrayers and accusers of one another because of their dissensions over the truth of doctrine, which not everyone is able to learn. This is why they “hate one another.” Among the great many who will be engaged in questions of this sort, those “false prophets who deceive many” will report prophecies concerning the future inaccurately and will interpret them incorrectly. Very few will seek the truth. False doctrines in and of themselves cannot overcome the power of truth, but those who have itchy ears will multiply and will take delight in speaking evil contrary to the law. And the tendentious words of many teachers will do such great harm that even those whose charity was once fervent in the simplicity of faith will “grow cold” toward the divine mysteries and toward the truth. But whoever is able to see all these things and yet to remain in communion with the original purpose of the church’s founding and the apostolic tradition will be saved. In this way then the gospel will be preached to every soul and a testimony will be given to every nation, that is, to all the unbelieving thoughts of every single individual. Commentary on Matthew 39.

24:11 Many False Prophets Will Arise

24:12–14 The Gospel Preached Throughout the World

Preached Throughout the Whole World.

Chrysostom: What is even more terrible than all of these things is that they shall not even have love’s consolation. “Most men’s love will grow cold.” Even all this, however, will in no way harm those who are noble and firm. So do not be afraid. Do not be troubled. If you demonstrate the patience that fits your faith, these dangers will not prevail over you. You will see proof of this when the gospel will be preached everywhere in the world. Then you will be above all these things that would otherwise alarm you. You will preach everywhere. You will not waste away in despair asking whether you will survive. Then he added, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.” The sign of this final time will be the downfall of Jerusalem. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 75.2.

Leaving No Excuse.

Jerome: The sign of the Lord’s coming is that the gospel will be preached throughout the entire world, leaving no one any excuse. We believe that this has already been accomplished or is about to be

accomplished, since it appears to me that there remains no nation that does not know the name of Christ. Even if they haven't been visited by an evangelist themselves, certainly they have heard about the Christian faith from neighboring countries. Commentary on Matthew 4.24.14.

24:15 Daniel Spoke of the Sacrilege

The Abomination of Desolation.

Jerome: Whenever we are urged to use our understanding, the meaning is shown to be mystical. But we read in Daniel this only: "And for half a week my sacrifice and offering will be removed, and the abomination of desolation shall be in the temple until the end of time, and the end will be given in abandonment." The apostle also said in this regard that the man of iniquity, the enemy, would rise up against everything uttered by God and would dare to stand in the temple and be worshiped as though he were God. After Satan's work is finished, however, Christ's coming will destroy all who raised themselves against him and will return them to the state of divine abandonment. This man of iniquity can be interpreted either simply as the antichrist, or as the image of Caesar which Pilate put in the temple, or as the statue of Hadrian the equestrian which still today stands in the Holy of Holies. Because the Old Testament normally calls the abomination an idol, the word desolation is added here to indicate that the idol shall be placed there resulting in the temple's abandonment and destruction. Commentary on Matthew 4.24.15.

24:16 Let Them Flee to the Mountains

Flee to the Mountains.

Chrysostom: Having spoken of the ills that were to overtake the city, and of the trials of the apostles, and that they should remain unsubdued, and that they will overcome the whole world, he turns again to the calamities of the Jews. While the gospel dispensation will be gloriously fulfilled, the others will be faced with deepening adversities. He shows how intolerable the war will be, even in every detail.

"Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." When does he mean by "then"? These things will take place, he says, "when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place." He seems to me to be speaking of armies and wars. So flee. There is no hope of safety for you in the cities.

Yet some will say that it has happened again and again that the people of Judah have recovered from terrible times. Think of the conditions under Sennacherib. Remember Antiochus. Remember the time when the armies had come upon them and the temple had been seized and the Maccabees rallied to give their affairs an opposite turn! But Jesus forbids them thinking of any such rescue. He does not want to feed them false hopes. For this is different. It is the end time. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 76.1.

24:17 One on the Housetop

The Housetop and the Field.

Hilary of Poitiers: The roof is the summit of the house, the noble perfection of the entire dwelling. For one may not even say that a house exists if it does not have a roof. Whoever therefore is established at the summit of his house—that is, in the perfection of his body made new by regeneration, raised high by the Spirit and perfected by the absolution of the divine gift—should not allow himself to be provoked within by bodily enticements and to descend to the sinful desire for the lowly things of this world or fall from the heights of the roof.

“And let whoever is in the field not return to retrieve his tunic,” that is, if he is busy fulfilling the commandments, he should not return to his previous cares or desire clothing for this body, lest he restore and wear again the old tunic of sin with which he was once covered. On Matthew 25.5.

24:18 One in the Field

What Roof? What Field?

Origen: Whoever is in Judea, that is, “in the letter of the old law,” should flee to the mountains of the new things of the Spirit. And whoever is found to have gone up onto the roof, which is the Word, and stands high above his home should not descend to retrieve anything from within his house. For he who remains on the roof and denies himself will never need to come down.

Whoever is in the field must not turn back. If he is in the field in which the treasure is hidden, as the Lord taught in his parable, he must not turn back. If he is in the field to which Jacob was compared when his father blessed him, saying, “Behold, the smell of my son is like the smell of a bountiful field which the Lord has blessed,” in which everyone who lives according to the law will be blessed with the spiritual blessings

of the law, he still must not turn back. As the Scripture says, “You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the field.” Whoever therefore is in the field of “every plant which the heavenly Father has planted,” he too must not turn back. Just as he who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is unfit for the kingdom of God, so also the one in the field who turns back on account of those things which he ought to have forsaken will undoubtedly incur the abomination of desolation which is deception. This is especially true of those who had previously stripped off their old tunic (that is, “the old nature with its practices”) and return again to retrieve it. Commentary on Matthew 42.

To Take His Mantle.

Chrysostom: Under these conditions one would do well merely to escape with one’s naked body. So if anyone is on a housetop, he should not take time to run back into the house to get his clothes. For the evils are inevitable. The calamity is without end. Anyone nearby will surely perish. Therefore he adds also, “if one is in the field,” saying, “do not try to take cover or turn back to find your belongings.” For if those who are indoors flee, much more ought they that are out of doors not take refuge indoors. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 76.1.

Do Not Turn from the Church.

Epiphanius the Latin: The holy reading continues: “Let him in the field not turn back.” This field represents the church, as was demonstrated by the blessing our blessed patriarch Isaac gave to his son Jacob: “Behold, the smell of my son is like the smell of a bountiful field which the Lord has blessed.” The field was replete with a multitude of flowers and was redolent with the sweetest aroma. Clearly this signifies the church where the Lord’s flowers—that is, virginity, chastity, continence, confession, faith, mercy, justice, truth and martyrdom—are perfected. These are the flowers of the field, which is the church; the flowers in which the Son of God rejoices, which have merited God’s blessing. Therefore he said, “Let him in the field not turn back.” Likewise, the same Lord once said, “Remember Lot’s wife.” While fleeing the conflagration of Sodom, she looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt, leaving an example of foolishness behind her. Therefore the Lord admonishes us that clinging more fully to his love and faith, we would not turn back, yet rather would save our souls for eternal life. Interpretation of the Gospels 33.

24:19 Alas for Those with Child

Pregnancy, Infancy and Flight Viewed Spiritually.

Hilary of Poitiers: One must not believe that the Lord was drawing our attention to the burden of pregnant women when he said, “Woe to those who are with child.” Instead, he wanted to demonstrate the heavy weight of souls filled with sins, a weight which prevents them from escaping the storm of wrath stored up for them, whether they are on the roof or in the field. Suffering naturally accompanies pregnancy, and no one is born into the world without his entire body being shaken by the experience. Souls therefore who are found in a similar condition will continue in their suffering and burdens.

“Woe also to those who are nursing.” The weaned infant is no less unfit for flight than is the one who is still nursing. But if the difference in age and status between those who are nursing and those who are weaned is of no importance, how are we to understand “Woe also to those who are nursing”? This warning is meant to show the infirmity of souls who were being taught to know God as though they were being nursed. But in fact they only had a weak foretaste of the knowledge of God and were deprived of the strength which comes from the perfect food. The Lord’s woe therefore is said to the souls themselves who are too weighed down to escape the antichrist or too weak to face him because they had not been avoiding sin and because they had not been fed with the true bread.

Therefore we are admonished to pray that our flight does not take place in the winter or on the sabbath. In other words, let us not be found in the coldness of our sins or in the absence of good works. A heavy, intolerable affliction will be visited upon everyone, unless those days are shortened because of the elect of God. On Matthew 25.6–7.

Ties of Sympathy.

Chrysostom: He first mourns for the one weighed down by the burden of pregnancy, who cannot flee easily, who is less mobile. Then he mourns for “those who are nursing.” They are bound by ties of sympathy for their children. Yet they cannot protect those who nurse. Who can escape these bonds of natural affection? By comparison, parting with money is nothing. How could the pregnant woman become mobile? How could she that nurses be able to overlook that which she had borne? The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 76.1.

Times of Tribulation.

Epiphanius the Latin: The holy reading continues: "Woe to those who are with child and to those who are nursing in those days." This means woe to those who have conceived suffering and begotten iniquity by neglecting the faith. For just as a pregnant woman in flight has no rest but only pain and tribulation, so also sinners and disbelievers in the Christian faith will have nothing but grief when the day of judgment comes upon them.

The holy Gospel next says, "Pray that your flight not fall in the winter or on the sabbath, for there will be a tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world." These two times, winter and the sabbath, represent two races of people: the Gentiles and the Jews. Just as everything is fruitless, desolate and dead in the winter, so also are the Gentiles. The Lord is hereby warning us therefore not to be found as the Gentiles: desolate, dead and without the fruit of good works on the day of judgment or in the time of persecution. The sabbath ... is a day reserved entirely for leisure. The Jews do nothing on the sabbath other than rest. We ought to be vigilant then that the time of persecution or the day of judgment does not find us resting. Whoever is found like this will deservedly suffer "a tribulation such as the world has not seen since its beginning." Interpretation of the Gospels 33.

24:20 The Time of Your Flight

Not in Winter.

Chrysostom: Recall that this discourse is addressed to the Jews. He is speaking here of the ills that should overtake them. He is not speaking primarily to the apostles, who did not keep the Jewish sabbath day. They were nowhere around when Vespasian did these things. Indeed, most of the apostles would soon be dead or in other distant parts of the world.

It is to the Jews that he says "Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath." Pray that it not be in winter, because of the difficulty of the season. Pray that it not be on the sabbath day, because of the absolute authority exercised by the law. For they had need of flight, and of the swiftest flight. The Jews would not dare to flee on the sabbath day, because of the law. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 76.1.

A Winter of Evils.

Cyril of Alexandria: Perhaps this saying contains a puzzle. It admonishes us to pray that our departure from this body would not happen in the time of rest from good works, which the sabbath signifies, nor in the time of unfruitfulness, which is winter. It is notable, however, that God did not create the winter of misfortunes. Winter means the time that we are possessed by the fleshly passions. Fragment 269.

24:21 Great Tribulation

Pray amid the Greatest Tribulation.

Chrysostom: You must pray, for “then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.” Do not let anyone suppose that he is merely speaking in hyperbole. All you need to do is study the writings of Josephus to learn the truth of these predictions. No one who knows the fact of history can say that Christian believers have exaggerated this tragic history or been any part of trying to see that Christ’s words were fulfilled. For Jesus himself was a Jew, a determined and faithful Jew, very zealous. And among believers who lived after Christ there were many Jews. What then is this man predicting? That these terrors would surpass all tragedy. And indeed no such similar tragedy has ever overtaken any nation. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 76.1.

24:22 For the Sake of the Elect

No One Would Be Saved.

Chrysostom: This is a tribulation such as never has been before nor will be. He adds, “And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.” By this he is indicating that they are deserving of a more grievous punishment than any that had previously been experienced. He is speaking now of the days of the war and of the siege. If the war of the Romans against Jerusalem had continued, all the Jews would have perished. By “no human being” in this case he means the Jews. And this doubtless applies to Jews at home and abroad. For the Romans were fighting not only against those in Judea but also against those Jews that were dispersed everywhere. They too were outlawed and banished, because of the Romans’ hatred against the Jews of Judea. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 76.1.

The Shortening of Days.

Origen: "Those days" refers to the commandments and truths which were placed in Scripture for the illumination of rational souls. Accordingly, every doctrine that comes from "false knowledge" and is joined to the words of Scripture is to be understood as corresponding to additions beyond the natural length of days in Scripture. The good God, however, shortens the addition of these days through whom he chooses. Whenever you see then by the advent of the Word of truth in your mind that the "arrogant who fight against the knowledge of God" are cut off, understand that the days of tribulation are shortened. The extra length is abbreviated which the abomination of desolation always adds in opposition to the natural number of the days of the Lord which are in Scripture. "Those days" will be shortened "for the sake of the elect," so that they will suffer nothing from the desolation of abomination nor from what was added to the true and natural days of Scripture. This assumes that the addition of days has been shortened and that the only remaining light is that of the word of truth. Commentary on Matthew 45.

Believers in Their Midst.

Chrysostom: But who in this case does he mean by the elect? He means the believers that were hidden away in the midst of them. In order that Jews may not say that it was because of the gospel and the worship of Christ that these ills took place, he showed that so far from the believers being the cause, if it had not been for them, all Jews would have perished utterly. For if God had permitted the war to be protracted, not so much as a remnant of the Jews would have remained. But lest those of them who had become believers should perish together with the unbelieving Jews, he quickly put down the fighting and allowed an end to the war. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 76.2.

24:23 Ignoring False Reports

Do Not Believe It.

Jerome: "If anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There is the Christ,' do not believe him." At the time of the Jewish captivity by Rome, many Jewish elders claimed to be the Christ. There were so many, in fact, that there were three distinct camps of them when the Romans besieged Jerusalem. This saying is better understood as referring to the end of the world, however.

“False Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so that even the elect might be led into error. Behold, I told you.” As I have already noted, this passage is to be explained in one of three ways. It refers either to the Roman siege of Jerusalem or to the end of the world or to the war waged by heretics against the church and by antichrists who oppose Christ under the pretext of false knowledge.

“If, therefore, they say to you, ‘Behold, he is in the desert,’ do not go out. And if they say ‘Behold, he is inside,’ don’t believe it.” If anyone were to tell you that Christ dwells in the wilderness of the pagans or in the doctrine of the philosophers or within the inner chambers of heretics who promise to reveal the secrets of God, do not go out and do not believe them. And lest false prophets find an opportunity for deceiving you at a time of persecution and anxiety, you should not trust just anyone who claims to speak in the name of Christ. Commentary on Matthew 4.24.23–26.

24:24 False Signs and Wonders

False Christs Will Arise.

Epiphanius the Latin: We are warned by the Lord so that if anyone were to come to us falsely in his name, none of us would believe in such a person, having already been prepared. Henceforth how great will be the signs by which the faith of the elect is demonstrated! But whoever builds his house on the rock, that is, establishes his faith on Christ, cannot be destroyed by winds or rains. The rock represents Christ, the floods are the kings, and the winds are the kings’ orders to persecute the servants of God.

The holy reading continues: “False Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so that even the elect would be led into error, if possible. Behold, I have told you.” You see then, beloved, what great love the Lord displays toward us. He carefully instructs each one of us individually regarding the future so that even if we see all these signs come to pass (having been forewarned by him) we will be wise to the enemy and accept nothing contrary to Christ and the catholic faith. In the Acts of the Apostles, Simon declared himself to be the power of God. Likewise, in the last days, the antichrist will declare himself to be God, as the apostle says, “Thus he will sit in the temple of God, calling himself God ... whom the Lord Jesus Christ will kill with the breath of his mouth.” The day of judgment will come upon the antichrist also, and the Lord will kill him with the sword of his mouth. Interpretation of the Gospels 33.

24:25–26 I Have Told You Beforehand

24:27 As the Lightning Comes

Truth Radiates from East to West.

Origen: Christ is shown to be the Word and Truth and Wisdom of God from the very first creature of the world to the last of the writings of the apostles (that is, from Genesis through the apostolic books of the Bible). No Scripture written after these is to be believed in the same way. Because “the law and the prophets prophesied until the coming of John,” the law and the prophets represent the lightning or radiance of truth which “comes from the East and shines as far as the West.” The East represents the law, and the West represents the “end of the law,” which is marked by “the coming of John.” The church alone has neither removed one word from this radiance nor added any prophecy of its own. If we were to consider carefully why the Evangelist does not use the singular here but writes of a plurality shining “from the East to the West,” we would see that the law and the prophets are one thing and Jesus Christ himself is yet another reality which extends from East to West, appearing to the apostle Paul “last of all, as to one untimely born.” Commentary on Matthew 47.

Illuminating the Fullness of Truth.

Theodore of Heraclea: For it is much the same with lightning. Lightning is figuratively compared with truth. It is likened to the coming of the Son of man, which is explained in every Scripture, whether it concerns the law, prophecy, the gospel or apostolic testimony. It flashes out from the east, the region of principalities and spiritual powers, and shines all the way to the west, the realm of darkness and Satan, in the time of the Passion. Note that if the law is rising in the east, the end of the law is setting in the west. But from Jesus Christ to Paul is a rising and setting. He was revealed to Paul last of all as “to one abnormally born.” Fragment 124–25.

24:28 Eagles Gathered Together

Wherever the Body Is.

Jerome: We are taught about the sacrament of Christ by the use of a natural example taken from daily life. Eagles and vultures are said to sense the presence of a carcass all the way across the sea and to gather

their food in this way. If therefore these irrational creatures have the natural capacity to know where a small body lies, even though separated by so great a distance across land and sea, how much more ought we and the whole multitude of believers hasten to him whose splendor comes from the east and shines as far as the west!

In Greek the body is called a *ptōma*, but the Latin word for it, *cadaver*, is more illuminating because it comes from the word “to fall,” *cadere*, and implies that the body has fallen dead. We can understand this body to refer to the Passion of Christ because wherever Scripture says that we are gathered together, it is for the purpose of coming to the Word of God. For example, “A company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet,” “like a lamb led to the slaughter,” and in other passages like these. The eagles represent those saints whose youth is renewed like the eagle’s and who, according to Isaiah, shall mount up with wings to come to the passion of Christ. Commentary on Matthew 4.24.28.

24:29 After the Tribulation of Those Days

A Great Change Will Come.

Chrysostom: The sun shall be darkened, not destroyed. It will be overcome by the light of God’s presence. The stars shall fall, for what shall be the need of them thereafter, if there is no night? And “the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” For a great change had come to pass. When the stars were made, they trembled and marveled. When the stars were made, all angels praised the Lord with a loud voice. Much more upon seeing all things in course of final change, and their fellow servants giving account, and the whole world standing by that awful judgment seat, and all those who had lived from Adam until his coming having an account demanded of them of all that they did, wouldn’t you expect the powers of the heavens to tremble and be shaken? The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 76.3.

The Recapitulation of Creation.

Cyril of Alexandria: How will they not shudder with fear? For heaven and earth are transformed for the sake of God’s own discretion (to speak something accurately about such things requires more than one word). The sun and the moon will be darkened, and the stars will fall like flowers. Their very nature is again changed by the One who created them, just as he wills, and the heavenly bodies will be thrown into disorder. For as humanity is renewed the whole creation, which had been created for the sake of humanity, is recapitulated and restored. Fragment 271.

24:30 The Sign of the Son of Man

The Appearance of the Son of Man.

Chrysostom: “Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven.” The cross will be brighter than the sun. The sun will be darkened and hide itself. The sun will appear at times when it would not normally appear. But why is this sign given? In order that the brazenness of the Jews might be more abundantly silenced. For having the cross as the greatest plea, the Son of man thus comes to that judgment seat, showing not only his wounds but also the reproach of his death. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 76.3.

24:31 The Angels Will Gather the Elect

The Gathering of the Elect.

Origen: You will understand why the saints are gathered “from the heights of the earth” if you consider the conduct of their lives and the perfection, insofar as possible, of their dealings with others. All who lived uprightly will be gathered not simply from the earth but “from the heights of the earth.” After their earthly lives have ended, their conduct in the next life will raise them not simply from the highest point in heaven, as it was from the highest level of earth, but from the “heights of the heavens” because each and every heaven has both a beginning and a conclusion or perfection. After their exemplary lives on earth, the saints’ conduct in the first heaven, once they have attained its perfection or conclusion, will elevate them still further. The same is true for the second heaven and the third heaven. It seems to me therefore that there are many heavens, each with its own initiation and perfection. It is from the beginnings and ends of these diverse heavens that God gathers his elect.

“From the heights of the heavens to their ends.” It is also possible that the heavens here represent either the divine Scriptures or their authors, in both of which God dwells. In that case, the heights of the Scripture is its beginning, and the perfection of Scripture is its conclusion. To say that the saints will be gathered from “the heights of the heavens” means that they will be found from among those who live in the beginning of Scripture to those who live at its conclusion, or, if I may speak more profoundly, from the unskilled to the experts.

The angels who will be sent by the Savior to gather his elect will gather them not just with any ordinary voice but with what Scripture calls a “great trumpet.” It won’t be an uncertain voice but one that is definite

and clear so that all who hear and learn will be established on the way of perfection which leads to the Son of God. Commentary on Matthew 51.

24:32 Learn the Lesson of the Fig Tree

From the Fig Tree Learn Its Lesson.

Hilary of Poitiers: The parable of the fig tree is offered as a lesson in recognizing the signs of the times. When its branches become tender and green we know that summer is near. Both this fig tree and this summer are very different from those found in nature, however. In nature there is a considerable interval between the onset of summer and the greening of a tree's branches, which begin to grow tender early in the spring. Consequently this parable cannot be about the tree. Indeed, we have already dealt above with the particular meaning of the tree. We saw that Adam had covered himself with its leaves to hide his shameful conscience, which is to say that he was bound under the law as though clothed in sin. The fig tree's branch therefore represents the antichrist, who is a son of the devil, a partaker of sin and protector of the law. When it begins to grow tender and green, then the summer, which here represents the day of judgment, is near. The greening of the tree then refers to the rise of sinners, a time that will be marked by the flowering of slanderers and the popularity of criminals and favor for blasphemers. This signals that summer, the heat of eternal fire, is near. On Matthew 26.2.

How Long a Time?

Chrysostom: The time is "immediately after the tribulation of those days." After how long a time would it be? They desired to know in particular the very day. So he puts forth the analogy of the fig tree. He indicates that the interval was not great but that in quick succession these things would occur at his advent. He declared this not by the parable of the fig tree alone but by the words that follow. "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near." He foretells a spiritual summer, a calm for the righteous that would come on that day, after the storm. But to sinners, on the contrary, there would be winter after summer, which he declares in what follows, saying that the day shall come upon them when they are living in luxury. For these two purposes he spoke about the fig tree: in order to declare the short interval and to underscore that these things assuredly will come to pass. It was possible for him to have demonstrated this in other ways, but

he chose the fig tree as an example of a necessary series of things occurring in sequence. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 77.1.

24:33 At the Very Gates

He Is Near.

Origen: The fig tree may be understood to represent the people of the circumcision. The Lord came to them when he was hungry and, “finding no fruit there” but the appearance of life only, said, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” At his coming therefore this fig tree, the people of the circumcision, “withered immediately.” But the other fig tree, the one which until that time had been barren and was about to be cut down because no one had ever applied himself diligently to its cultivation, began to bear fruit when fertilizer was spread around it. What was formerly a blight upon the earth will now produce fruit in such abundance sufficient even for the entire time in which it was barren. Commentary on Matthew 53.

24:34 Until All These Things Take Place

This Generation Will Not Pass.

Chrysostom: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.” All these things. What things? Those about Jerusalem, those about the wars, about the famines, about the pestilences, about the earthquakes, about the false Christs, about the false prophets, about the sowing of the gospel everywhere, the seditions, the tumults, and all the other things which we said were to occur until his coming. What does he refer to when he says “this generation”? He is speaking not of the generation then living but of the age of believers. For he is prone to distinguish a generation not by times only but also by the mode of their religious service and practice, as when he says, “Such is the generation of those that seek him.” He said “all these things will take place,” and yet “the gospel will be preached.” These two are not inconsistent. The generation of the faithful shall remain through all things that will surely come to pass. The faithful will not be cut off by any of the things that have been mentioned. For both Jerusalem shall be destroyed and a large part of the Jews shall be decimated, but over this generation—the faithful—shall nothing prevail, not famine, not pestilence, not earthquake, not the tumults of wars, not false Christs, not false prophets, not deceivers, not traitors, not those that cause to

offend, not the false brothers, nor any other such temptation whatever. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 77.1.