



---

Conducted by  
James Gardiner

---

Please comment on the meaning of Matt. 24:28 — “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

### The Eagle

It might be best to begin with a few interesting points concerning the bird Jesus mentions in the verse—the eagle. There are several of the species scattered throughout the world, most important of which are the Imperial Eagle, the Golden Eagle, the Spotted Eagle and the White-tailed Eagle. Jesus uses the word in a comprehensive or generic sense, of course, and is simply referring to “eagles” in their capacity as birds of prey. The eagle is a truly magnificent creature of tremendous power, strength and rapacity. It swoops with incredible speed upon its victim and it can soar to surprising heights. Its specially designed eyes enable it to see victims or carrion at fantastic distances. It is therefore used as a fit emblem of power and fierce cruelty in the Old Testament of the Chaldean armies (Jer. 4:13; 48:40; Hosea 8:1; Hab. 1:8).

The custom of the eagle of carrying its young from inaccessible cliffs is used as a symbol of God's providential care of the Israelites (Ex. 19:4). The eagle is also said to be able to renew its youth in some way (alluded to in Ps. 103:5; Isa. 40:31) and naturalists state they can live to well over one hundred years. Many other interesting facts emerge from a brief study of this amazing bird, but suffice it to say for the present that our Lord was referring to its seemingly uncanny ability to find every dead carcass, and very often, in fact, to fly around in the sky awaiting the death of its victim. It is sometimes thought that in Matt. 24:28 Jesus was referring to vultures, because eagles eat only that which they kill; but apparently this is a mistaken idea, for eagles, like vultures, are quite happy to consume dead meat if they happen to find it. God commends the attributes of the eagle to Job (in chap. 39:27-30): “Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up the blood, *and where the slain is, there is she.*”

The last phrase is similar to the statement of Jesus, is it not? Where the slain (carcase) is, there is she (the eagle).

### Comparison with Luke 17:37

The statement "For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together" has a parallel in Luke 17:37: ". . . Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together."

It is interesting to note that in Matt. 24 the statement about the carcase occurs after Jesus' warning about the upsurge of false Christs, whereas in Luke 17 the statement occurs after Jesus' prediction that two shall be in one bed, and one shall be taken; two grinding at the mill, and one taken; two in the field, and one taken. If we go back to Matt. 24 and look for the verses which mention there being two in the field and in the bed we notice that they occur at verses 40 and 41. We are left with the slight problem as to whether the statement about the eagles and carcase is in its proper position in Matthew, or whether the statement is properly applied in either Matthew or Luke. We must remember that Jesus is answering two questions, at least, in Matthew 24: *i.e.* (verse 3)—when shall the destruction of Jerusalem be? and, When shall the end of the world and the final coming of Christ be? During the ensuing answers in the chapter we must be careful not to confuse the two, for Jesus says much about the destruction of Jerusalem (by the Romans in 70 A.D.) and much about His final coming. His statement about the eagles in Matt. 24 seems to relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, while in Luke 17 it appears to refer to His second coming. From Luke 17:37 we notice that His remark about the eagles was prompted by the question, "Where, Lord?" This is something we do not learn from Matthew 24.

### Jewish Religion and Jerusalem

My personal view is that the remark made by Jesus that where the carcase was there the eagles would be gathered together had reference to the coming destruction of the Holy City—Jerusalem.

Much is sometimes made of the fact that the Roman armies had an eagle as their military emblem on their banners and standards, but I think this was entirely coincidental and was not what Jesus had in mind. Surely He was meaning that the carcase (Jerusalem and the Jews) was about to be as completely destroyed by the Roman armies as an animal carcase would be by eagles. To God the Jewish religion and the once Holy City were now but a putrid corpse about to be removed: not to be removed by gradual change or deterioration, but suddenly and efficiently—as eagles deal with a carcase. We know from subsequent history, and especially from the writings of Josephus, just how efficiently and terribly was this done.

And so to the question, "Where, Lord?" [*where* will these calamities, of which you have spoken, take place?]. Jesus tells his questioners to find the carcase and they have found the answer to their question. Once you realize *where the carcase is* you will understand why the eagles will make haste there, and *there* the calamities will occur. Surely the carcase was Jerusalem and the Jews, and surely the Roman armies were rightly described by the Lord as being the voracious eagles, destined to leave nought but the bones.