

A Scriptural Explanation of Matthew 24

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THERE ARE THREE CHAPTERS IN THE BIBLE THAT have given rise to a multitude of controversial doctrines. These are the 20th chapter of Revelation, the 9th chapter of Daniel and the 24th chapter of Matthew. These chapters have produced many confusing doctrines and explanations that have been the source of many books being published besides tracts and endless articles on the subject. We do not intend to refute all of these, but we do wish to give a simple explanation of Christ's teachings as they are recorded in the 24th chapter of Matthew.

Possibly the best way to deal with this chapter is to take a few verses at a time and explain them as we go along. Matthew 24:1 begins as follows: "And Jesus went out and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Now you will notice that in the King James Version the next verse starts a new paragraph and it is as follows: "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?"

We will observe here that the time that the disciples came to him was subsequent to when he was in the temple. He was now at the Mount of Olives, and the questions that the disciples asked him were twofold. The first question is, "*When shall these things be?*" and second, "*What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*" Obviously, there are two questions asked here. The one relates to the statement of Christ that "there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." Of that question, the disciples asked, "When shall these things be?" Of the end of the world, the question is asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?"

It seems quite apparent that the disciples thought of the destruction of the temple and the end of the world as happening simultaneously. Christ's detailed and careful account of events that follow shows that He predicted the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem as one event for which many unmistakable signs were given; but the end of the world provided no signs and the event would be in the counsels of the Father. Of that event we are only told to "watch and pray."

Now to answer these questions, Jesus said unto them: "Take heed that no man deceive you." It will help a great deal if we remember that these questions are asked in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The 13th chapter of Mark and the 21st chapter of Luke contain the same question, and they also contain the same instructions, namely, "Take heed that no man deceive you." So obviously, there is a warning here for us to be on our guard against any false teachings or interpretations that are not in harmony with the words of Christ.

The warnings are detailed in the verses that follow: "Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. 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. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. 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. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. 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."

Let us pause at this point to observe the teachings of Christ. It is a time when there will be many false Christs. It is also a time when there will be turmoil and tribulation among nations, nation against nation,

kingdom against kingdom, famines, pestilences, earthquakes; and then in Matthew 24:8 it says: "All these are the beginning of sorrows." Many people point to wars, famines and earthquakes as signs of the end but Christ says these are the beginning of sorrows and this word sorrow means *birth pangs*. It is translated from the Greek word— *oden*. It means that the world will suffer many things, and among them wars, famines and earthquakes contribute to the conditions that will prevail. Among other things, the Christians will be afflicted; they will be hated, and then they will be betrayed and will most certainly suffer. This also says that because iniquity should abound the love of many shall wax cold. This should not discourage us. It tells us that the ones who endure to the end shall be saved.

One of the things that will prevail is that of the preaching the gospel. Many people point to the fact that the gospel is now taken by missionaries to many parts of the world and the Bible is translated into many languages as a sign of the end times. I would like to point to Colossians 1:23 which reads as follows, "If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof, I, Paul, am made a minister." You will notice here that the gospel has already been preached to the world that was known by the Apostle Paul and this then could not be taken as a sign of the second coming of Christ.

The next passage is very important. It says, "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:) then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day; For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

It should be observed in these verses that a very grievous event is about to transpire. It is signaled by the abomination spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Many interpret this passage of Christ's teaching with the end of the world. However, in Luke's gospel it says: "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them that are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20-22). You will notice here that the same instruction is given for the presence of the Roman armies around Jerusalem as for the abomination of desolation spoken of in Matthew's gospel. And the assurance that this is the fulfillment of all things in regard to the destruction of Jerusalem is found in verse 22, "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." This includes the great tribulation which is mentioned in Matthew 24:21.

It is further evident that it is the destruction of Jerusalem that is referred to when he says that we should pray that the flight from the city would not be in the winter time nor on the sabbath day. This certainly is instruction that would not be relevant to the end of the world time. It is, therefore, quite clear that Christ is giving a detailed description of what to do when the destruction of Jerusalem is imminent. History records the value of this instruction, for when the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem, the people who followed the instructions given by Christ, fled to the mountains for their lives. The city of Jerusalem resisted the Roman armies longer than the Romans thought they would, so they withdrew their armies to Judaea and killed people without mercy and without respect to the circumstances; but while they were carrying out this mission, the Christians within Jerusalem escaped and fled to the mountains for their lives. Thus there were few Christians who lost their lives during the siege of Jerusalem. They followed Christ's instructions and the church was saved out of it.

The destruction of Jerusalem is without parallel in the history of the world. The entire nation was subjected to the most brutal slaughter and those who remained alive were deported and dispersed throughout the world and the Jews became a people without a homeland from that time forward. Josephus was a

historian of the events at that time and he told that Jews were crucified on the walls of the city of Jerusalem until there was not enough room for the crosses nor was there enough wood to make them with. *It was a time when it was very true that except those days would be shortened, no flesh would be saved.*

Now notice verses 25-28, “Behold, I have told you before. 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. 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. For wheresoever the carcass is there will the eagles be gathered together.” At this point, it is interesting to observe that the crest of the Roman army was the eagle and the destruction of Jerusalem was certainly the carcass that they gathered around and they carried out the judgment that Jesus had pronounced on His way to Calvary. “*Weep not for me but for yourselves and for your children.*” He also said, “Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stoneth them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate.” Desolate means, “*forsaken by God.*” In this way, Christ showed that judgment was imminent and that the destruction of Jerusalem was the judgment of God.

Now it continues in verses 29-35, “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: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 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. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

Many people are puzzled about the reference to the sun being darkened and the moon turned into blood, and the stars falling, and think that these are signs of coming events before the Second Coming. But we should notice that Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

A similar passage is recorded in Isaiah 13:10-11 which says, “For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.” This prophecy which is almost identical with the one in Matthew 24 was pronounced on Babylon. Another portion is quoted in Joel 2:30-31, “And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come.”

In Acts 2:14-21, Peter referred to this Scripture as follows: “Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be it known unto you, and harken to my words.” Then Peter quotes Joel, “And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Peter was speaking about events that had taken place on the day of Pentecost. He was not referring to some dim distant prophecy. Concerning the sun being darkened and the moon turned to blood, the explanation given by Peter shows that Pentecost is the watershed of world history, an event of such magnitude that it is compared to changes in the sun, the moon and the galaxies. Matthew 24:29 describes the same event: “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 heaven shall be shaken.”

It will be observed that the Bible has a number of historical events of such magnitude and catastrophic effect that they are compared with the upheaval of the solar and stellar counterparts. Thus Isaiah depicted the

fall of Babylon. And thus Joel, Peter and our Lord described the downfall of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, it also provided the circumstances for a new and better way of life. Out of disaster, unbelievable suffering, famine, earthquake and sword which Christ foretold in detail, He said: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt 24:32-35).

The fig tree was an indication of summer not winter. But Jesus said that the generation to whom He was speaking would see and experience all that He foretold, namely the destruction of Jerusalem and the downfall of the Jewish nation. But He concluded by saying, "Now learn a parable of the fig tree." Out of peril, suffering and defeat shall rise a new beginning. This new beginning commenced on the day of Pentecost, where Peter, in addition to saying the sun would be darkened and the moon turned to blood, declared that when these things happened, that "whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Thus the darkening of the sun and the phenomena of the moon portrayed the eclipse of the Jewish nation with its mandate over religion and its transfer to Christ and the Kingdom of God and the salvation of the world.

So up until this part of the interpretation of Matthew, it is evident that Christ is referring to the end of the Jewish nation and the destruction of Jerusalem and of the judgment that befalls them in dispersing them as a nation throughout the countries of the world.

We now turn to the second question asked by the disciples of Jesus. The first question was: "*Tell us when shall these things be?*" The second question: "*What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?*" Jesus answered the second question beginning at verse 36. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, *but my Father only.*"

I would like to take a little time to ponder the importance of this answer. In the first place, regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, there is detailed information given. There are detailed signs given (the fig tree, for instance, and the various signs, such as the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel and which Luke describes as the armies of Rome that would surround the city). And a fairly detailed description of when it would take place is given. But in verse 36 Jesus speaks of that coming day, the end of the world, and he said that no man knows the time of that day, not even the angels in heaven, "*but my Father only.*" So this is an entirely different thing that Jesus is giving instruction for here. He says: "As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." In Luke 17:28, it adds, "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all."

In both these references it describes a world that was carrying on business as usual. They were not aware of any judgment that was about to befall them. They were marrying, giving in marriage, buying and selling and carrying on the usual normal business that is negotiated between people. But when the flood came and the fire came, it put an end to all that they were doing. Jesus said that the end of the world will be similar. People will not be prepared for it and the only instruction that is given in the Bible is to watch and pray. In other words, to be ready. We are not given signs to seek for but we are to look for the Son from heaven. Jesus will come again; but we will not be able to tell by any sign or circumstance.

In Acts 1:6-8, we see a repetition of the concern for God's intervention in the affairs of man. "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Here is Christ's reply: "And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come up on you." You will notice here that the Apostles still hoped for a kingdom of an earthly nature to be restored to Israel. Jesus' reply was that they would not know

the time nor the season which the Father has put in his own power. This is almost identical to the instruction given in Matthew. No man shall know the time and neither would the angels in heaven, but my Father only. *God holds the times of the end in His own hand.* We do not know, and it is not given for us to know, either the times or the seasons or any sign regarding how to discern when the end will be. We are told only to watch and to pray and to be ready when He comes.

This is the same teaching that is found in Matthew 24:40,41: “Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” Much time is spent trying to determine whether a righteous one is taken and an evil one is left or vice versa. It does not say. What it is trying to tell us, however, is that the coming of the Lord will be *sudden* and the separations will be *final*. That two people are in the field or two women grinding meal is only indicative of the fact that people will be carrying on the ordinary pursuits of life, but the difference will be in the spiritual relationships with God and we should always be ready for the summons that is inevitably going to come. We are told, therefore, to watch and this is practically the only information that is given concerning our being ready for the great summons from on high.

The balance of the chapter is taken up with the matter of being ready to meet that great call. For those who are ready, there can only be rejoicing and gladness; but for those who are not prepared to meet God in harmony with His commands will face judgment that will result in disappointment beyond any human conjecture. We are exhorted, therefore, to watch and to pray and to be ready for this call of God.

The 24th chapter of Matthew is not difficult to explain. From verses 1-35, Christ describes the fall of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. He gives many signs and details of what to expect and when it is going to take place. What He prophesied to take place is precisely what happened in AD 68-70. Christians who heeded Christ’s words fled to the mountains and were “saved” from the holocaust that befell the rebellious ones who remained in the city. The things that happened to these survivors was so indescribably terrible that even Josephus, the historian, described it as “The Judgment of God.” But from verse 36 to the end of the chapter, Jesus speaks of “that day,” “the end of the world,” or “the Second Coming.” Of that day, knoweth no man. No sign is given and no time is specified. We are simply told to “WATCH!”