

MATTHEW CHAPTER 24

QUESTIONS THAT TROUBLE MANY

The subject of any chapter in the Bible must be determined by the historical setting and the plain statements which are contained in the context. In the first two verses we read: "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came to Him to show him the building of the temple. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'" Everything which transpires in this context MUST be understood in light of this CLEAR statement of Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

As we read on in the chapter, we find Jesus sitting on the Mount of Olives, and the disciples came to Him privately to ask IN ESSENCE, ONE question, with THREE PARTS. The FIRST part is: "Tell us, WHEN will THESE THINGS BE?"(v.3). Now, what are the THINGS to which they referred? It is OBVIOUS that it is the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem to which Jesus had just referred. In His answer, Jesus said there would be false teachers and even false Christs who would arise!(v.5). Gamaliel speaking to the consul in Acts 5:36,37 says that such had already happened! Jesus also said that there would be "wars and rumors of wars"(v.6). Flavius Josephus, a contemporary historian (uninspired) of the destruction of Jerusalem, tells us that the period preceding the destruction was one of turmoil and WAR everywhere! Jesus also said there would be famines and earthquakes(v.7) which would signal the beginning of travail. Then He said they would KILL the apostles(v.9), and of course we know that James was killed, and later Peter and Paul, and so on. Only John died a natural death. Jesus said that the event he was speaking of would take place AFTER the gospel had been preached to the whole inhabited earth (or world) (v. 14). There are MANY today who are STILL trying to accomplish this, and they believe that when it is DONE, Christ will return! But, Paul said in Colossians 1:23 "...if indeed you continue in the faith grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, WHICH WAS PREACHED to EVERY CREATURE UNDER HEAVEN, of which I, Paul, became a minister." In this same chapter, verse 6, Paul says: "...the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it HAS, also IN ALL THE WORLD..." NOW, IF Paul affirmed that the gospel had ALREADY been "preached to every creature" in his OWN lifetime, what are we to conclude about the event which Jesus was prophesying? IT MUST have ALREADY HAPPENED! So if Christ was to return when this was accomplished, HE MUST HAVE ALREADY COME! But, we KNOW that this is not TRUE! Jesus was talking about the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and NOT His second coming!

Now, the next two parts of the question are connected in thought: "And what will be the sign of Your coming, and (what will be the sign) of the end of the AGE?" You will notice that the word AGE appears here in the New King James Bible, as well as in the American Standard Bible. The reason for this is that in the Original Greek Text, this is the true meaning of the word which was used by the inspired writers. It is the unfortunate choice of "end of the world" by the old King James translators that has caused many Bible students to draw false conclusions regarding this passage. Now, let's consider the signs to which Jesus points their attention: The "abomination of desolation" (v.15) has caused many to wonder just what Jesus had in mind. To understand this, we need to briefly review the history leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. In A.D. 68, Vespasian was about to seige Jerusalem whenever Nero died. Vespasian then returned to Rome to take control of the Roman Empire. Prior to this, Roman soldiers under his direction had been destroying synagogues throughout the Empire, working their way to Jerusalem! By inspiration, in Luke 21:20 we find the Roman armies clearly identified with the Abomination of Desolation: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near." NOW, keep in mind that Luke 21 is a parallel passage to Matthew 24, and there can be no DOUBT as to the meaning in

Luke's account! In A.D. 70, Titus, the son of Vespasian, set out to finish what his father had started! Under his direction, Jerusalem was brought under siege and utterly destroyed! All of this can be substantiated by reading the works of Flavius Josephus in the Wars of the Jews, Books 3 & 4. Jesus said that "great tribulation" would result(v.21). Josephus says that the Zealots had taken over the temple and were profaning it by the shedding of human blood. Before the siege was complete, there was vicious bloodshed among the Jews. Bodies filled the streets, and people even resorted to cannibalism! The 'carcass' referred to in verse 28 and also in the parallel passage of Luke 17:37 is the 'dead body' of national Israel as far as their being the 'people of God' ever again! If you will take the time to check the word which is rendered 'eagle' here, you will find that it more properly describes the vultures which were attracted to dead bodies. In verses 29 we hear Jesus say "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." Since there is no historical record of these things LITERALLY happening, some have concluded that this is yet FUTURE. But if you will consider such Old Testament passages as Isaiah 13:1-13 you will see the significance of such prophetic language. In verse 1 Isaiah says that this is "The burden against Babylon", and in Verse 10 he says "the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine." Then in the next verse he says "I will punish the WORLD for its evil..." He goes ON in verse 13 to say "I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place.." which will be the manifestation of the "wrath of the Lord of hosts". Now, ALL of this was to be upon BABYLON! And, it is ALL IN OUR PAST! Also, in Isaiah 19:1 we read about "the burden against Egypt" and it says that "the Lord rides on a swift cloud". All of this is to signal judgement or destruction upon Egypt! And it is ALL in the PAST! Then in Ezekiel 32:1-10 we begin by observing that this is a "lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt"(v.2) and it refers to the "day of his fall" (v.10). Now, notice the words which are used in the prophecy. In verse 7 God says: "I will put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light." Keep in mind that this is ALL in the distant PAST! So, we can see how Jesus was using prophetic language in Matthew 24 to describe the wrath of God which would be unleashed upon Israel! Many today have trouble with the word "coming" with respect to Jesus in this context. One important point which must be remembered is that the Apostles did NOT fully comprehend the fact that Jesus was going to "leave" them! And in fact, Luke records in the twenty-fourth chapter, the first twelve verses, that they were surprised whenever He did return from the dead! Think for a moment- what was there in the context of Matthew 24 that would cause them to ask a question about the second coming of Christ? Perhaps a look at Luke's record of this same question will help us to understand the nature of their query. "And they asked Him, saying, 'Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?'"(Luke 21:7) What then was the question? "When will You be present to do this thing to the Temple, and how will we know the time is near? Verses 16-20 Of Matthew 24 tell them to "flee to the mountains" when they saw the signs. In fact, they were not even to go back to their houses for anything! Now, this is the same thought we find in verse 31 where Jesus said "He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." This is totally consistent with the context of the chapter, and can only be properly interpreted in that light. The most important point found in this context as the TIME period under consideration is in verse 34:"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till ALL these things are fulfilled." Mr. Hal Lindsey, the author of "The Late Great Planet Earth" says that this simply means the generation that saw the signs, and thus whatever generation sees these signs will not pass away until ALL these things are fulfilled! BUT- the recognized authorities on the Greek language do NOT agree with this conclusion. Arndt & Gingrich in their Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament say that this refers to "the sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time; generation, contemporaries...Jesus looks upon the whole contemporary generation of Jews as a uniform mass confronting Him." To this agree FOUR other recognized authorities on the Greek Text. There is NO WAY we can honestly stretch this word to mean 2,000

years either! Now, keep in mind that this covers the whole discussion which began in verse one. Then in verse 27 we see Jesus using the lightening across the sky to show that this event will NOT be some secret happening, but one that ALL will notice! Some still stumble over "that day" in verse 36. Many will try to divide the context and say that at this point, Jesus shifted to the second coming. But there is NOTHING in this context that would point toward the second coming at all! In fact, it all points AWAY from this idea! The "day" which they were asking about was the "end" or literally the "consummation" of the "age". What "age" were they talking about? It was the "age" that forever came to an end whenever the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed! Keep in mind that as long as the Temple stood, there was at least a semblance of the Jewish system. But whenever God brought His wrath upon Israel, the covenant with them was forever brought to an end. There is no way they can ever worship God again according to the Law, for they have no way of appointing a High Priest, or even a Priesthood. All of the genealogical records were destroyed by the destruction of not only the Temple, but even the synagogues in the various cities. Thus they have no way of knowing who would be qualified to serve as High Priest. Yet some will STILL try to inject the Judgement Day into "no one knows the time"(vs.36-39 & 42-44). But, there is a problem with this! Jesus WAS giving them the SIGNS to watch for, and if they were watching they would not be taken by surprise!

So it was NOT a matter of the event coming as a total 'surprise', but the EXACT TIME was not known by any save the Father. One of the biggest problems people seem to have today is with the phrase "one will be taken and the other left" in verses 40,41. Some will try to tell us that this is the "rapture" and many wild, unscriptural fantasies have been concocted from this passage. BUT- if you will once again look at the parallel passage in Luke 17:22-37, you will find that Jesus was talking about "one of the days of the Son of man", and used the destruction of the world in the days of Noah and the destruction of Sodom to teach, about the destruction of Jerusalem! Here, in this context, He says: "one will be taken and the other left"(vs.34-36). Now, if you will look back to Matthew 24:16-18 you will find the meaning. They were to RUN! And some would of necessity be LEFT! For only Jewish Christians would understand the signs and FLEE! This has nothing to do with some being "raptured", or some dying and others living. It, as with ALL of Matthew 24, refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in A.D. 70! NO reference to the second coming of Christ with the so-called "rapture" or an earthly pre-millennial reign in Matthew 24 or any other passage in the entire Bible! When Jesus comes again, the saved will "meet him in the air" (I Thess. 5:1-11), and He will NEVER SET FOOT ON THIS EARTH AGAIN!

We must always "handle aright the word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), and not try to make something out of Matthew 24 that Jesus did NOT put in it. Those who do so, will not allow themselves to be caught up in vain speculations that are based on a gross mishandling of the Word.

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