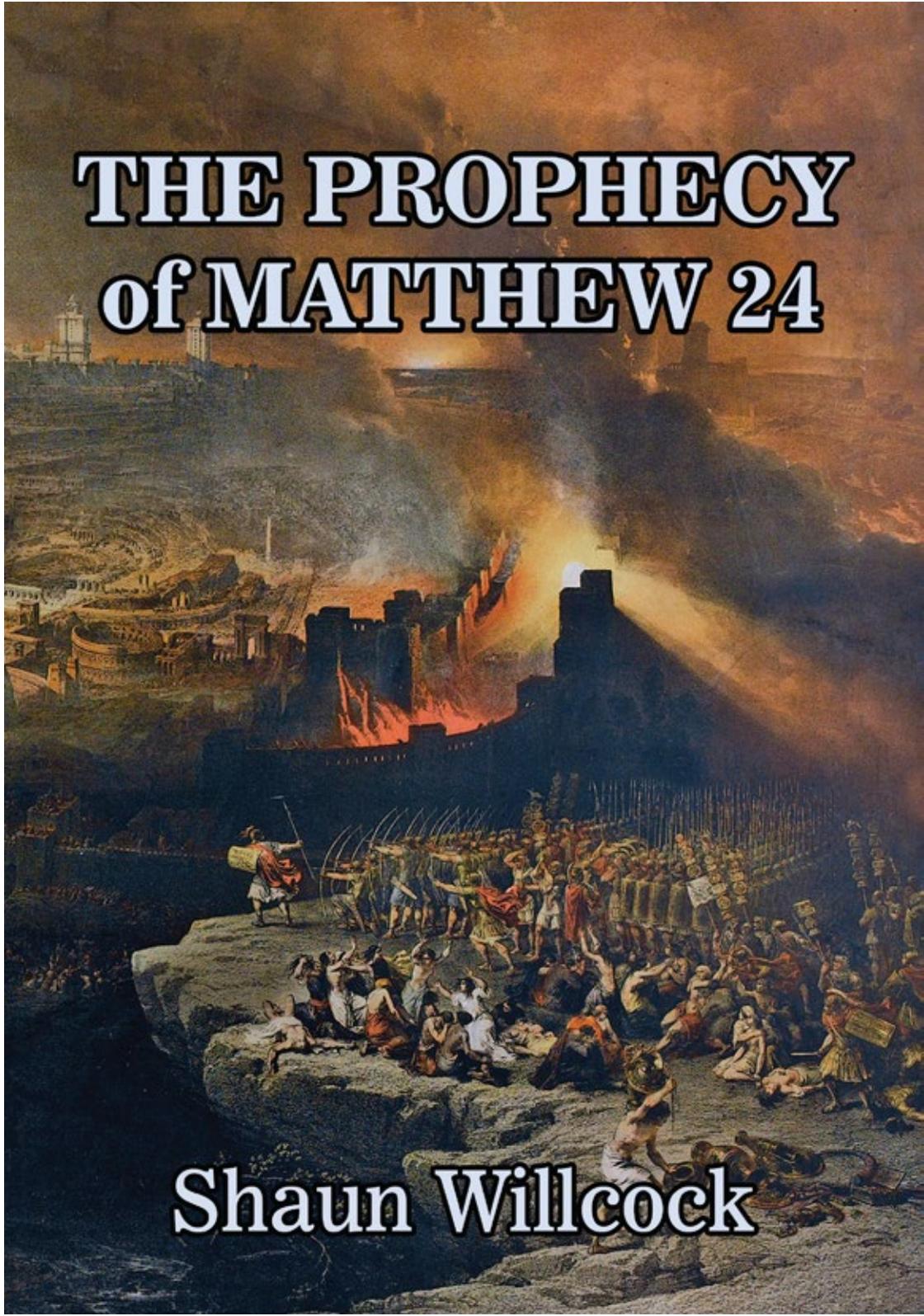


THE PROPHECY of MATTHEW 24



Shaun Willcock

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BIBLE BASED MINISTRIES



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INTRODUCTION

Matthew 24 is an extremely important chapter of Bible prophecy. It is packed with information, and very detailed.

The prophecies of Daniel are the foundation for the prophecies of the New Testament. Daniel's prophecies were given centuries before the Lord Jesus Christ came in the flesh; and when He came who is God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16), and who had given those prophecies to Daniel, He built upon them with further prophecies from His own mouth, as given in Matthew 24 and in its sister-passages in Mark 13, and Luke 17 and 21. Then later still, when Paul and John gave forth their prophecies by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they too built upon what Daniel had prophesied.

There was thus an unfolding prophetic revelation: first, Daniel's prophecies; then those of the Lord Jesus Christ; then those of Paul; then those of John in his epistles, and in the book of Revelation. Many of these built upon those which went before, and added yet further details; and the book of Revelation is the most detailed of all, the final Word from the Lord to His Church.

And this is how we must approach the study of these prophecies. We must build, layer by layer in chronological order, upon the foundation of the prophecies of Daniel. Failure to follow this logical, sequential, orderly, chronological revelation is a significant part of the reason why the prophecies of the end times are so misunderstood today. The Bible is its own interpreter. And when it comes to the revelation of future events, the Lord revealed a little at one time, a little at another: an unfolding prophetic revelation.

Before coming to a study of the prophecies of the Lord Jesus Christ as given in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 17 and 21, it is necessary to have some understanding of the three main prophetic interpretations, two of which have sown so much confusion among Protestants. The following is condensed from my book, *Trappings of Popery*,¹ in which a much fuller analysis is given:

1. *The Historicist system.* This system of prophetic interpretation holds the prophecies of Daniel, Revelation, and elsewhere, to be “history divinely written beforehand”. In other words, *history, through the centuries, fulfils Bible prophecy.* The Lord, in His prophetic Word, told His Church beforehand what would come to pass in time, and history is but the outworking, in time, of divine prophecy. Prophetic fulfilment is not crammed into a brief period at the very end of time, but is fulfilled by the events of history *through many centuries.* Unashamedly, I assert that the Historicist system is the only truly biblically-based system.

2. *The Praeterist system.* According to the advocates of this system, virtually all the prophecies of the New Testament were fulfilled in the first century AD.

3. *The Futurist system.* According to the advocates of this system, almost all the prophecies of the New Testament are still to be fulfilled at some point in the future, very near the end of the world, and all within the space of a very short time – a period of just a few years. They claim that there will be a “pre-tribulation rapture” of the saints, followed by a seven-year (some say three-and-a-half-year) “great tribulation” under the government of some future Antichrist, followed by the second coming of Christ.

The most popular system of prophetic interpretation today is the Futurist system. But this was not always so. For centuries, the vast majority of Protestants were committed to the Historicist system. What happened to bring about this huge shift? In a word: *Jesuitism!* Both the Futurist and the Praeterist systems were invented by the Jesuits of Rome to deflect the Protestant world away from the Historicist interpretation of Bible prophecy! And this tactic has been all too successful: modern Protestants have swallowed the Popish, Jesuit trapping of Futurism, hook, line, and sinker.

Let us see how this was accomplished. Of necessity this can only be a very brief examination of the subject.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, it was the firm conviction of Protestants, steeped as they were in the biblically-sound Historicist system of prophetic interpretation, that the Roman Papacy was the prophesied Antichrist (2 Thess. 2), and that the Roman Catholic religion was the Great Whore (Rev. 17). In sermons

and literature, the pope of Rome was declared to be the Antichrist of God's Word, and Protestants everywhere were firmly convinced of it. The works and the doctrines of Rome left them in no doubt. The evidence fitted the scriptural picture perfectly. And this firmly-held, scriptural conviction greatly nerved Protestants to resist the evils of Romanism, even amidst much persecution and suffering.

The diabolical Roman Catholic Jesuit Order came into being in the sixteenth century, its purpose being to annihilate Protestantism. The Jesuits realised that there was no way for Rome to regain the ground she had lost unless they were able to deflect Protestants away from the conviction that the pope of Rome was the Antichrist and the "Church" of Rome was the Great Whore of Revelation. As long as that conviction persisted, Rome could make no headway. The Jesuits, therefore, came up with two alternatives to the Historicist system of prophetic interpretation: *Praeterism* and *Futurism*.² Two Jesuits, Alcazar and Ribera, were commissioned by their Order to produce two opposing theories of prophetic interpretation, so as to confuse the Protestants and deflect them away from the truth that the Roman Papacy is the prophesied Antichrist.³

Praeterism was devised by the Spanish Jesuit priest, Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613).⁴ He taught that John the apostle wrote about events which occurred in his own time, in the first century AD, and that therefore the book of Revelation dealt with events in the old Roman Empire, which was of course long past; and thus all those prophecies were *fulfilled*. The pope of Rome, then, could not be the Antichrist.

Futurism was devised by the Spanish Jesuit priest, Francisco Ribera (1537-1591).⁵ He taught the very opposite of *Praeterism*! He taught that the book of Revelation dealt with *future* events, to occur *just prior* to Christ's return. He taught that Antichrist was a single individual who would only appear in the far-distant future, at the very end of the world, abolish Christianity, rebuild the Jewish temple, and be welcomed by the Jews. There was, therefore, no need for anyone to either view the pope of Rome as the Antichrist, or to be at all concerned about who he would be.

And this – with modifications – is essentially the view that has been propagated by countless Protestant preachers and authors for many, many decades now!

In *The Beasts and the Little Horn*, Roman Catholic author, G. S.

Hitchcock, admitted the Jesuit origin of both Futurism and Praeterism when he wrote: “The Futuristic school, founded by the Jesuit Ribera in 1591, looks for Antichrist, Babylon, and a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, at the end of the Christian dispensation. The Praeterist school, founded by the Jesuit Alcazar, explains the Revelation by the Fall of Jerusalem or by the fall of Pagan Rome in 410 AD.”⁶

Later, Ribera’s theory was expanded by other Roman Catholic scholars. The Roman Catholic cardinal, Roberto Bellarmine (1542-1621), the great controversialist and the foremost apologist of the Counter-Reformation, declared that the biblical prophecies about Antichrist in the writings of Daniel, Paul and John had nothing to do with the Papacy. He taught that the Antichrist was a single individual at the end of time.⁷

Futurism received some new twists in the early nineteenth century, through the writing of yet another Jesuit, Emmanuel Lacunza (1731-1801). He added the germ of the idea of a “rapture” *before* the second coming of Christ, which was progressively developed by others into the “pre-trib rapture” doctrine within Futurism.⁸ Lacunza’s book, published in 1812, was entitled *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*. It was written in Spanish, and Lacunza, a Chilean of Spanish descent, wrote under the assumed name of “Rabbi Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra”! As a good Jesuit agent, working to undermine Protestantism, Lacunza concealed his true identity and pretended to be a converted Jewish rabbi, so as to deceive the Protestant world. He succeeded.⁹ The Futurist error entered Protestantism, via a twisted path,¹⁰ and as these false teachings spread, so confusion spread amongst Protestants – exactly what Rome had always wanted, and exactly why she had used the Jesuits Ribera, Alcazar and Lacunza to promote theories of prophetic interpretation directly at odds with the Protestant Historicist understanding which had served biblical Protestantism so well for so long. Protestants have readily accepted a doctrine of the diabolical Jesuits of Rome as being the truth of Holy Scripture!

Coming now to the prophecies given by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:

This chapter (and its sister-passages in Mark 13, Luke 17 and Luke 21) is a favourite of Futurist interpreters of prophecy. They teach that it is all about the events just prior to the second coming of Christ, and

about the second coming itself. And we can say, without hesitation, that this is undoubtedly the most popular interpretation of this chapter in the world today.

But a careful study of the entire chapter reveals that this is an incorrect interpretation. Although it may look good, and although it may appeal to modern generations because it makes for very exciting and sensationalist exposition, to interpret the chapter in this way means that one is forced to ignore the obvious historical fulfilment of one verse after another, as well as the context, and the relationship of this chapter to various other Scriptures. All these things point to its fulfilment in the dramatic events leading up to, and occurring in, the year *AD 70*, when the Roman army besieged Jerusalem and finally captured it!

Now it just so happens that this is how Praeterist expositors interpret the chapter. Believing as they do that all prophecy was fulfilled in the first century already, they generally interpret Matthew 24 and its sister-passages in Mark and Luke as having been fulfilled by the events leading up to, and in, the year *AD 70*.

But let it be clearly understood: I am *not* a Praeterist, nor am I advocating Praeterism. I am a firm and convinced Historicist, as any study of my sermons and writings on biblical prophecy will make abundantly plain. Praeterism, like its opposite, Futurism, was, *as a system of prophetic interpretation*, a Jesuit invention.

Why, then, do I (and, be it noted, a great many other Historicist expositors) hold that the prophecies of Matthew 24 were fulfilled by the events which occurred in the year *AD 70*?

Praeterism, as a system of prophetic interpretation, claims that virtually *all* New Testament prophecies (including those in the book of Revelation) were fulfilled in the first century *AD*. This is a grave error. But just because they are incorrect in claiming that *all* prophecies were fulfilled in the first century already, this does not mean that *some* of the prophecies were not fulfilled then! And that this is the case has, in fact, nothing to do with Praeterism at all. It is *what the Bible teaches* that we must receive, *regardless* of whether or not it has also been included in some false system which came along long after the Bible was written.

Just because Futurism and Praeterism are false prophetic systems of interpretation, this is not to say that they are in error on *everything*. They have to get *some* things right, they cannot misinterpret *every* verse

of Bible prophecy, or people would very easily see through their errors. They have to correctly interpret at least some parts of prophecy, and they do. But that which is true within them, is true because it is found in the Word of God – *not* because it is a part of Futurism or Praeterism.

For example, Futurism teaches the “pre-tribulation rapture”. Futurists are correct in teaching that there will be an instantaneous catching up of all believers to meet the Lord in the air, for this the Scriptures most definitely teach; their error is in the timing of this event, for they claim it occurs a number of years before the last day and Christ’s second coming, whereas Scripture teaches it occurs on the last day, when Christ returns. An Historicist believes in the catching up of the saints to meet the Lord in the air, not because Futurists teach it but because it is *biblical!* He does not go to the Futurist system to get this teaching; he goes to the *Bible*, and finds it there.

Now it so happens that Praeterism teaches that Matthew 24 was fulfilled in the first century AD, by the events around the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. In this, Praeterists are correct. Their error is in teaching that *all* prophecies were fulfilled in that first century. But an Historicist, who believes that the prophecies of Matthew 24 find their fulfilment in those events of the first century, believes this, not because Praeterists teach it but because it is *biblical!* He does not go to Praeterism to get this teaching; he goes to the Bible.

Therefore, a Bible expositor who rejects Praeterism, and yet who teaches that Matthew 24 was fulfilled by certain events which took place in the first century AD, is not being inconsistent. He is not teaching Praeterism. He is teaching what the Bible reveals. The fact that it happens to be a matter which Praeterists also teach is entirely irrelevant. To reject this exposition of Matthew 24 because Praeterists also happen to teach it, would be utterly foolish. It would be as foolish as rejecting the biblical teaching that Roman Catholicism is the Great Whore, just because the Seventh-day Adventist cult also happens to teach this; or as foolish as refusing to teach the biblical doctrine of hell, just because it so happens that Popery has taught about this as well.

This book, then, is *not* a Praeterist exposition of Matthew 24. It is an exposition of Matthew 24 based on the biblical and historical evidence. It just so happens that many Praeterists have made use of the same evidence.

One other important point must now be made. Although it is true, as will be shown with a wealth of evidence in the following pages, that Matthew 24 was fulfilled, *primarily*, by the events pertaining to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation in AD 70, and that therefore it is an error to expound it as being only fulfilled by events leading up to, and including, the second coming of Christ, it will nevertheless also be shown, again with a wealth of evidence, that this chapter's prophecies have what we may call a kind of *secondary* fulfilment, in an antitypical sense, in the events just prior to, and including, the second coming of our Lord and Saviour.

This is a fact that has been noted by many, even though they did not hold to the Futurist method of prophetic interpretation. It is very glaring: with a knowledge of the historical events of AD 70, one may read the chapter and see how those events fulfil every part of it; and yet, the same reader may then read it a second time, and see how the times just prior to the second coming of Christ appear to fulfil much of it as well!

What are we to make of this?

There is only one possible way to reconcile these things: much, though not all of it, is prophecy with a *double fulfilment*. Its primary fulfilment occurred in the events around AD 70 – and we may be certain of this because (as will be seen) *every single verse* was fulfilled at that time, so that there is simply no other honest way to understand it – the evidence is just too overwhelming; but even so, much of it has a secondary, antitypical fulfilment in the events at the very end of the world – and we may be certain of this because the language the Lord Jesus uses here is so similar to other portions of prophetic Scripture which definitely speak of the second coming. There is thus the type, and the antitype: the events around AD 70 typified events at the end of the world and the second coming.

The Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, was one of those who came to this conclusion. In the introduction to this chapter, he wrote: “Now, in this chapter, we have, I. The occasion of this discourse, ver. 1-3. II. The discourse itself, in which we have, 1. *The prophecy of divers events, especially referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the utter ruin of the Jewish church and nation*, which were now hastening on, and were completed about forty years after; the prefaces to that destruction, the concomitants and consequences of it; *yet looking further, to Christ's*

coming at the end of time, and the consummation of all things, of which that was a type and figure, ver. 4-31. 2. The practical application of this prophecy for the awakening and quickening of his disciples to prepare for these great and awful things, ver. 32-51."¹¹ (Italics added).

Another Bible commentator, Matthew Poole, reached the same conclusion, and made it even clearer, in his comments on verses 3 and 4 of the chapter: speaking of the signs Christ gave His disciples, Poole wrote, "which signs, though some have distinguished, appropriating those in the former part of the chapter to the destruction of Jerusalem, and those in the latter part to the day of judgment, *yet they rather seem in our Saviour's discourse mixed together*; and time, which is the best interpreter of prophecies, must expound them to us. The destruction of Jerusalem is a thing past many hundreds of years since; so as by those histories which we have partly in holy writ, partly in other authors, it will not be hard to pick out what our Saviour intended for signs of that destruction, *though there are some signs which were common signs both of that destruction and of the end of the world, and it is agreed by divines that the destruction of Jerusalem was a type of the destruction of the world, and therefore most of the signs are common to both.*"¹² (Italics added).

Actually, it is not uncommon in Scripture for prophecies to have more than one fulfilment, and for one fulfilment to typify another. Here are just a few examples:

Psa. 2:1-3. We are told, in Acts 4:24-28 that this prophecy was fulfilled by Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jews, when they opposed and persecuted the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry. But this prophecy was also fulfilled during the ministry of the apostles, when they preached the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles, and were persecuted for it; for in persecuting His servants, they were persecuting Christ (Acts 9:5). And furthermore, it is a prophecy which has continued to be fulfilled throughout the Gospel age, countless times, whenever Christians have been persecuted by the enemies of Christ.

Psa. 8:2. In the immediate context in this Psalm, the verse is to be understood, not literally of infants, but figuratively of those who are as "babes" in their own eyes, and in the eyes of the world; namely, the apostles and all the later preachers of the Gospel, as well as of all Christians in general (see Matt. 11:25; 1 Cor. 1:26-28). But even so,

we find Jesus applying this verse to literal children, in Matt. 21:15,16; showing that this verse has more than one fulfilment.

Hos. 11:1. Firstly, this is a statement of what the Lord had done in the past: He had loved Israel, and had called him (Israel is here called God's "son") out of Egypt. But secondly, this is also a prophecy of the time when the Lord would take His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, out of Egypt – as is clear from Matt. 2:15. Israel was God's adopted son, and was as such a type of Christ the Son of God; and Israel being taken out of Egypt not only was a type (as is well known) of the deliverance of the elect from sin and Satan's kingdom, but was also a type of Christ being taken out of Egypt. Truly, then, as Matthew Henry stated, "the words have a double aspect, speaking historically of the calling of Israel out of Egypt and prophetically of the bringing of Christ thence; and the former was a type of the latter".¹³

A final example (more could be given): *2 Sam. 7:12-16.* Here a prophecy was given to David, concerning the setting up of his seed after him on the throne of Israel, and the establishment of his kingdom for ever; that he would build a house for the Lord's Name; that the Lord would be to him a Father, and he would be to the Lord a son. And it is very clear that this was a prophecy with a double fulfilment. First, it was fulfilled in David's son, Solomon. But second, it was fulfilled in that Son of David who was "greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42), the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! For although Solomon became king over Israel, Christ was established as King over all His spiritual Israel (Lk. 1:32,33); and although Solomon built the great temple of the Lord, Christ is building the greater, spiritual temple, the true Church (Zech. 6:12,13; Matt. 16:18; etc.); and although God was a Father to Solomon, and Solomon was the Lord's son by adoption, Christ Jesus, in a far greater sense, is the Son of the Father (see Heb. 1:5).

The prophecy clearly finds its greater fulfilment in Christ the Lord (see also Psa. 89). Solomon was the type, Christ is the antitype.

In addition to the examples given above, there are various Old Testament prophecies which dealt with real events in the history of the people of God in the Old Testament, and yet carried within them deeper meanings, relating to another time, far in the future. And so it is with this great prophecy in Matthew 24 – which, after all, was given by the Lord Jesus, who was a Jew living as a Jew, under the Old

Covenant. This means that when He spoke as a prophet, He did so as the Old Testament prophets spoke! Therefore, it is not surprising that His prophecy in Matthew 24 had a double fulfilment, and that in its primary fulfilment in the events surrounding AD 70 it was a type of the end of the world and the second coming, which is its secondary fulfilment, the antitype of the type.

May the Lord bless the study of this wonderful chapter to the reader!



CHAPTER ONE

PROPHETIC PREFACE

MATTHEW 23:34-39

34. Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

35. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

36. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest 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!

38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

39. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

In order to put Matthew 24 in its proper context, we must study the final verses of chapter 23; for the first verse of chapter 24 follows immediately after the last verse of chapter 23. There were no chapter divisions when the books of the Bible were originally written. And the last few verses of chapter 23 are very important to our understanding of chapter 24.

v.34: *“Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes”.*

Matt. 23:1 says, “Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples”. His words in chapter 23 were addressed to both the unsaved

and to the saved; to the multitude, and to His disciples. And in v.34 He said that He would send unto them prophets, wise men, and scribes. But when did He do this?

He did not mean the prophets of the Old Testament, but men whom He raised up as prophets after He returned to heaven (Jn. 20:21). They were the prophets and apostles of the *New Testament* period, as we are told in Lk. 11:49: “Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute”. These men were the “gifts” given in Eph. 2:8,11: “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.... And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets”. And Eph. 2:20 says: “And [ye] are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets...”

As for the “wise men, and scribes”, these are the ordinary ministers of the Word: those called pastors and teachers, and evangelists, in Eph. 4:11. Such men are “wise men and scribes” when they are true servants of the Lord: wise in the Scriptures; wise with the wisdom the Lord gives; and wise to instruct others unto the kingdom of God: “Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matt. 13:52). In the first century AD the Lord sent out His apostles and prophets; and He sent out, and still sends out, pastors and teachers, to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, and to teach the believers all things, whatsoever Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20).

In verses 29 and 30 the Jews had said that if *they* had lived in the days of their ancestors, they would not have killed the prophets – oh no, not them! Well then, said the Lord Jesus, I will send *you* prophets as well, to see whether you will or not. And of course (as He Himself prophesied here in v.34), they would indeed do to them exactly as their fathers had done to the Old Testament prophets who had been sent to them. They would kill, crucify, scourge, and persecute them. And in doing so they would “fill up the measure” of their fathers’ sins (v.32). The meaning of this is that their fathers had sinned greatly, but the iniquity of this people was not yet full (for comparison, see Gen. 15:16); it had not yet reached the brim of the cup, so to speak; but now their descendants, in the first century AD, would fill up the cup to the

brim, by crucifying the Son of God, and persecuting the prophets and apostles He sent to them (1 Thess. 2:14-16). *That* generation, then, would bring upon their nation, city and temple, the judgment of God. This occurred in the year AD 70 (four decades after Jesus spoke these words), God's instrument of punishment being the Roman army.

v.34: *“and some of them ye shall kill and crucify”.*

This certainly happened! Stephen, a deacon, was stoned (Acts 7:54-60); James, an apostle and the brother of John, was killed by the sword (Acts 12:1,2); Peter was put to death (Jn. 21:18,19); and early Church history indicates that most of the others were as well. The history of the early Church, in fact, is full of the martyrdoms of so many of the Lord's servants. But although the Lord's words were fulfilled in those early decades, it is also true that throughout history, and right down to this very day, multitudes of the Lord's faithful ministers have been killed.

v.34: *“and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues”.*

This of course is what the Jews did to Christians in the first century AD. This was the primary fulfilment. But if we take “synagogues” to be representative of *all* religious places of worship, then it speaks of the fact that Gospel ministers would be scourged (i.e. taken broadly, treated cruelly) in all kinds of religious places, by religious men, through the centuries (Jn. 16:1,2). “Synagogues” were the Jewish places of worship, but Papists worship in cathedrals, Muslims in mosques and Hindus in temples – and persecution through the centuries would mean Christians suffering at the hands of evil religious men in all these places and more.

v.34: *“and persecute them from city to city”.*

As the book of Acts shows, this certainly happened: Peter had to depart from one place and go to another (Acts 12:17); Paul had to be let down a city wall in a basket, and flee to another city (Acts 9:22-26); and when he was stoned in one city he went to another (Acts 14:19,20). The prophecy was fulfilled in those times. But also, it will always be fulfilled, in different parts of the world at different times. The Lord Jesus said, “But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another” (Matt. 10:23).

v. 35: *“That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth”.*

“The righteous blood” does not mean that the blood of some men is righteous in itself. All men are of one blood (Acts 17:26), and all men are unrighteous in themselves. It means that when godly men, men dressed in Christ’s righteousness, were martyred, their blood, shed upon the earth, could be spoken of as “righteous blood” because it was shed in the cause of righteousness, as they were put to death for being believers, followers of the Lord. Psa. 72:14 says that their blood is precious in the sight of the Lord. And because this is so, He will avenge their deaths.

Now upon *that* generation of wicked Jews would come the blood of all righteous men slain until that time. But why would this occur?

It was because that generation would crucify the Lord Jesus, and then persecute and kill His apostles and prophets, thereby demonstrating by such wicked deeds that they agreed with what their fathers had done to the Old Testament prophets! They approved of what they had done; they copied them; and if they had been alive then, they would have done the same thing. It was, therefore, perfectly righteous and just of God to bring upon them the punishment for all the blood of the righteous ones who had been slain in centuries past by their forefathers.

v.35: *“from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.”*

Their sins filled up the measure of their fathers. By their own atrocious deeds they brought down the wrath of God upon them, for all the blood of the righteous servants of the Lord, shed from the beginning of the world. For they themselves had the same spirit of hatred and persecution against the servants of the Lord, and therefore they crucified the Messiah, and persecuted His apostles and prophets.

Abel lived at the very beginning of the world, and was murdered by his brother Cain, because Cain’s deeds were evil and Abel’s were righteous (1 Jn. 3:12). He was the first man ever to suffer and die for righteousness’ sake; the first ever to be persecuted and killed by a wicked man. He was righteous by an imputed righteousness, being dressed in the righteousness of the coming Messiah; and by faith in the Messiah who was to come, he offered a proper sacrifice (Heb. 11:4): not only was it a blood sacrifice (whereas Cain offered vegetables!),

but also, Abel knew that his sacrifice typified the coming sacrifice of Christ, in whom he trusted. He died for righteousness' sake, and his blood cried out for vengeance; as God said to Cain, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10). And it also cries out, so to speak, against all who live and act as Cain did, persecuting those who are righteous!

As for Zacharias, or Zechariah, he was the son of a priest named Jehoiada, called Barachias by Jesus. But this is not unusual, for many men in those times had two names, and both names are very similar in meaning. Jehoiada signifies "Praise the Lord", and Barachias signifies "Bless the Lord".

According to 2 Chron. 24:20-22, Zechariah was slain "in the court of the house of the Lord," or as Jesus said, "between the temple and the altar." For the words, "in the court of the Lord's house", mean essentially *in the midst of* the temple. At times, the word "temple" was used in Scripture to mean the entire sacred edifice, or building. But sometimes (as here in Matt. 23:35) the word was used to refer specifically to the part of that great building which was covered. Now between that part, and the altar of burnt offerings in the court of the priests, there was a space, which the Jews often called the space between the porch and the altar. By "porch" they meant the porch that led into the temple. Only the priests could go into this; it was very holy; and therefore Jesus mentioned this fact to show how great was the sin of those Jews who went into the place where only priests were allowed to go, and killed Zechariah there.

Even so, Zechariah's death occurred hundreds of years before Jesus spoke these words. So the question arises: why did He refer to the death of this particular man? Why not use a more recent example?

Here is the reason: Abel was the *first* righteous man ever to be slain; and Zechariah was in fact the *last* one to be mentioned in the Old Testament Scriptures, whose blood is said to have cried out for vengeance, just like Abel's.

Also, Jesus used this man as an example, because this terrible deed was done in the holy place, and by the people at the command of the king; so that, although the people Jesus was speaking to did not kill him *in their own persons*, they *did* do so, as it were, because they were of the same nation, and of the same persecuting spirit. This is why

Jesus says to them, “whom ye slew.” Not “ye” of this *generation*, but “ye” of this *nation*, and “ye” of this *persecuting spirit*. The people of the Jewish nation were, generation after generation, guilty of terrible sins. And when, in AD 70, the Lord destroyed them by the hands of the Romans, it was a punishment greatly deserved.

v. 36: “*Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.*”

Here is something important for our study of Matthew 24. Verses 34 and 35 of Matthew 23 can be applied to Christian ministers in all the centuries of the Christian era. Throughout the Gospel age they would be persecuted, killed, tortured, etc. But there was a *primary fulfilment* in the first century AD. In other words, Jesus was speaking, first and foremost, about the situation as it would exist *then*, in that first century AD, and for the early apostles, prophets, and pastors of the New Testament period. But the fact that Gospel ministers would suffer for Christ throughout the ages can be gleaned from this as well.

And here in v.36, the Lord was showing us very clearly that although there are lessons to be learned from verses 34 and 35 that are applicable to Christian ministers in all ages, and although what happened to the ministers of the first century would happen to ministers in the centuries that followed as well, the fact remains that when He spoke these words, they had a *precise, primary fulfilment* at *that* time: the first century AD.

“All these things shall come upon this generation.” Which generation? The one then living; the one to whom the Lord Jesus was speaking! These things, He said, would happen to the Christians of that time, the earliest age of the Church, the apostolic age; and also, the judgment for the blood of all the prophets of past ages would come upon that generation of wicked Jews, to whom He was speaking. For many of them would still be alive in AD 70.

This is very important, because it greatly aids us in properly interpreting the prophecies of Matthew 24. Futurists claim that *all* of Matthew 24 refers to some time still in the future, very near the second coming of Christ; but these words make it plain that in fact, what is revealed in Matthew 24 would be fulfilled *in the first century AD already*. Yes, lessons regarding His second coming may be gleaned from it, certainly, but only in type: it was a prophecy fulfilled in the events around AD 70.

All the things of which Matt. 23:36 is dealing came upon that generation – the generation then living, the generation being addressed by Christ. To them would be sent Christ’s apostles and prophets and ministers, and the Jews would scourge them in their synagogues, and crucify them; so that the blood of all righteous men slain upon the earth from the very beginning would come upon *that* generation. All the murders and persecutions of the past ages, committed by that nation, would be put to their account at that time; the guilt of all those sins would be imputed to them, as they were of the very same spirit, and guilty of the same sins; and then the punishment which they deserved would follow.

And verses 37 and 38 add still further details. The things mentioned in these verses, also, would come upon that generation of Jews alive when the Lord was on earth.

v. 37: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest 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!”*

Jerusalem, once called “the joy of the whole earth” (Psa. 48:2), would now be “an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword” (Deut. 28:37). It killed the prophets, the Lord’s messengers. And Jesus prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Roman army, on such a scale as the world had never witnessed before. This destruction occurred just a few decades later in AD 70, and is that with which chapter 24 is so occupied, as shall be seen.

Jesus’ words show that He longed to see all the citizens of this great city gathered to Himself. But many people, reading them, are under the impression that they imply a powerlessness on the part of Jesus to bring this about. The Arminian reads this verse and says that Jesus would not violate the “free will” of man: He longed to save them, but He could not, because of their own free will they chose not to accept Him.

But there is no powerlessness on the part of Jesus. And the Arminian interpretation is completely wrong!

The Lord Jesus is the Son of man as well as the Son of God; and here, He spoke as the Son of man. As God, He has full and absolute

power to save whom He will. “For who hath resisted his will?” (Rom. 9:19). None! If God wills something, it happens. But has God willed the salvation of all men? No, He has not. He has only willed the salvation of His elect. And thus, as far as His elect among the Jews at that time were concerned, each and every one was certainly gathered under His wings. Not one was lost!

But the Lord Jesus was speaking here as a man. He was speaking from His human affection and will, not from His divine will. This can be seen by the fact that He says, “*How often* would I”. Using the word, “often”, implies that there were times when He did not will this. But is this how He would speak, or express Himself, as God? No. God’s will is always constant, unchanging, continual. It does not have a beginning, and it does not cease. He does not will something “often”, but what He wills He *always* wills, constantly and unchangingly! As regards His will that all the elect be saved, this is something He wills *all the time*.

At this point, Jesus was speaking as a man, from the desire of His human nature. He was speaking here as you or I would speak. As God, He willed only the salvation of His chosen, the elect; but as a man, with a man’s compassion for His own people, He longed for all Jerusalem to be gathered unto Him. He had a human affection for this nation, His people (for He was born a Jew); He had a human desire to see them happy, and not harmed.

Furthermore, His words, “and ye would not”, also reveal that He was speaking of His will as a man. For if He was speaking of His will as God, here, with His divine power, then what He willed would indeed come to pass, and none of the inhabitants of that city could have prevented it! This is the biblical doctrine of God’s irresistible grace in salvation.

It is true of all men that, by nature, they *will not* come unto Christ, for life (Jn. 5:40). All men, by nature, are dead in sins (Eph. 2:1), and have no desire for salvation by Christ on His terms, nor any ability to come unto Him for salvation. It is only the irresistible grace of God which *makes* a man willing in the day of God’s power (Psa. 110:3). When, therefore, Jesus said, “and ye would not”, it is clear that He was not putting forth His divine power to accomplish this; He was simply expressing Himself as a man. From His human nature He desired this;

but they would not, for no divine power was put forth to bring it to pass, and therefore they stayed dead in sins, and dead to Christ.

Jesus, as man, desired the good of His nation. He longed for them to be gathered to Him, and that they would, at the very least, acknowledge that He was indeed their Messiah. Such an acknowledgment would not be the equivalent of saving faith in Him, but at least, if they had recognised Him as such, the destruction of their city would not have occurred.

We see a similar instance of the human affection of the Lord Jesus, in Lk. 19:41-44.

v. 38: “Behold, your house if left unto you desolate.”

Oh what words these are!

The “house” could refer to their capital city, Jerusalem, because in that city were strong, secure, beautiful houses; yet they would all be destroyed. But in particular it refers to the temple, which was called “the house of God”. That is to say, it *had been* the house of the Lord; but once the Lord departed from it, it was nothing but *their* house. The Messiah Himself, who, even as He spoke these words, was in that temple, was about to leave it (Matt. 24:1), never to return! And it would be destroyed four decades later, along with the whole city.

What a word that word, “desolate”, is! In this context it means forsaken by God; rejected; worthless. For their great sins, the Jews were about to be rejected by God, cast off and cast out, and punished as no nation had ever been punished before in the history of the world. It was now to be a desolate nation, and its temple a desolate temple. The Lord Jesus was saying that the sins of the Jews were such that God was going to judge and destroy them with tribulation such as had not been seen since the beginning of the world unto that time, and never would be again. Most especially, this would occur because of their greatest sin of all: their rejection of the Messiah whom God sent to them, even His own dear Son, and their terrible part in the killing of Him.

The “abomination of *desolation*”, which Daniel had prophesied about, was about to flood in upon them, stand in their holy place, and destroy them! We shall get to this in due course, when we examine Matt. 24:15, but in brief: the Roman army was the abominating desolation, not only because they were heathen who entered into the holy temple at Jerusalem, but also because they brought idolatrous abominations

into it with them.

v. 39: *“For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”*

They saw Him a number of times after this speech, but they would not see Him much after His resurrection. As Man, He was now leaving the temple, physically; and as God He was leaving it spiritually as well. He would never return to it. *“Ichabod”* (meaning “there is no glory”) would from henceforth be written over it, for the glory had departed from it (1 Sam. 4:21). *It was desolate.*

And none will see Him again, until that great day, the day of His second coming, when they will say of Him, “Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord!”



CHAPTER TWO

WHEN? AND WHAT?

MATTHEW 24:1-3

1. And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

2. 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.

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?

There is much to be gleaned about the glorious second coming of the Lord and Saviour to the earth, in this great chapter. But even though this is true, and we will see it as we proceed, the fact is that this prophetic chapter was fulfilled *in the first century AD already*. And a failure to understand this has so often resulted in this chapter being very incorrectly interpreted.

In it, the Lord Jesus prophesied about events in and around the year AD 70, concerning the destruction of the Jewish state, capital city, and temple. However, much of what He said here also had a typical meaning. Those very events in the first century *typified*, they *foreshadowed* or *prefigured*, events which will occur near to, and at, the very end of the world, and the second coming of Christ.

A type, in theological terms, is that by which something is symbolised or figured; a symbol, or an emblem; a person, object, or event at one point in history, prefiguring some person or thing revealed in a later time of history. To typify, then, in theological language, means to prefigure or foreshadow something; to represent in prophetic similitude.

We have already considered, in the Introduction, the prophecy found in 2 Sam. 7:12-16, where the Lord told David that after his death He would set up David's seed as king and establish his kingdom; and that this son of his would build a house, a temple, for the Lord. God would be his Father, and he would be God's son. We saw that this was clearly a prophecy of David's son, Solomon, who was indeed set up as king; God established his kingdom; he built the temple of the Lord; and the Lord loved Solomon, and was a Father to him. And yet it is very clear from Heb. 1:5, which is a direct quote from 2 Sam. 7:14, that although it was a prophecy about Solomon, it was also, in *type*, a prophecy about the Lord Jesus Christ, who is, pre-eminently, the "seed of David": the Lord God established *His* great and spiritual kingdom, and the throne of His kingdom for ever; He is building the Church, which is the Lord's true spiritual house; God is His Father, and He is God's Son!

The prophecy, then, had a double fulfilment. But it is important to note that there was a part of this prophecy which was *not* fulfilled by Christ. In 2 Sam. 7:14 it says: "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men". The Lord Jesus, of course, was sinless, He never committed iniquity, and therefore He was never chastened. This particular aspect of the prophecy was *only* fulfilled by Solomon. And the reason this is important is because in Matthew 24 it is clear that things occurred in AD 70 which typified things to occur at the second coming; but even so, the two events do not match up in every single detail! It is not the case that every single aspect of the fulfilment in the first century AD typifies something relating to the second coming as well. Also, as will be seen, although all parts of the prophecy are applicable to the type, some parts of it are more applicable to the antitype.

v.1: "*And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple*".

He left it, and would never return to it again, as we saw from Matt. 23:38,39. He had just said that the temple had been left desolate, and He had just prophesied of its destruction; and now He was about to do so again, in even more detail, in this 24th chapter. When God destroyed Jerusalem by the instrumentality of the Babylonians, centuries before, He moved His prophet Jeremiah to speak in very similar language to that of the Lord Jesus when He referred to this later destruction by the Romans: "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from

thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited” (Jer. 6:8).

In 1 Sam. 4:21,22, when the ark of God was taken by the Philistines, the pregnant daughter-in-law of Eli the priest began to travail with labour pains; and when her son was born she named him Ichabod, which means, “Where is the glory?” or “There is no glory”; for she said, “The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.” And now that the Son of God, Israel’s Messiah and glory, had departed from the temple never to return, truly, in a far greater sense than before, the glory had departed from the temple, and “Ichabod” was as it were written across it. Just a short time later, the Messiah would be crucified, and the veil of the temple would be torn in two.

But although He had left the temple, He had not left His disciples! And He never would. The Jewish nation was now forsaken, but His people, who would form the New Testament Church, never would be.

And when He left the temple, so did His disciples. What He did, they did. This teaches us that true Christians must be where He is, and must reject all that is not of Him. We must “go forth unto him without [outside] the camp, bearing his reproach” (Heb. 13:13).

The Lord Jesus Christ is rejected by religionists! He is not present in the camp of professing Christendom – the mixed multitudes calling themselves “churches”, yet rejecting the Word of God and filled with worldly people. They call themselves the Church of this and the Church of that; they say they are Christians; but they do not love or follow the Lord they claim to love and follow.

Christ is not there, and His people must not be there either! The religious Jews of His day persecuted Him; the religious so-called “Christians” of our day persecute and hate His true followers as well; and true Christians must depart from the worldly camp of professing Christendom, and go forth unto Him outside the camp. For that is where He is!

v.1: *“and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.”*

The disciples, being Jews, who all their lifetimes had been devoted to this magnificent, splendid temple, found it astonishing that it would be desolate, as He had just said it would be. Indeed it already was, for the Son of God, the glory of the temple, had departed from it, never

to return. That temple was a wonder of the world. Its beauty and splendour were unsurpassed in the world of that time. They pointed out to Him the great buildings, the magnificent architecture, the beauty of it, the huge stones. Mark's Gospel tells us it was "one of" the disciples who did this (Mk.13:1); but this simply means that one acted as the spokesman for all the rest. See also Lk.21:5.

Why did the disciples do this? We are not told. Perhaps it was to try to get Him to change what He had said about it being desolate, because they found it incredible to believe that it would or could ever be desolate, forsaken of God. For although the disciples were converted, they were still far too taken up with such earthly things as magnificent buildings, pomp and splendour. Even today, many professing Christians are very taken with cathedrals and ornate church buildings. But as with the temple then, so with many "church" structures today: they are mere shells, housing unregenerate men and hiding many sins.

Hag. 2:9 says: "The glory of this latter house [the temple] shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts". Christ Himself was "the glory of this latter house" – and He far outshone all the glory of the physical temple. The disciples should have been taken up only with *Him*, just as we should be as well.

v.2: *"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."*

Mark and Luke record the same words (Mk. 13:2; Lk. 21:6). The utter ruin of this magnificent temple was certain, for Christ prophesied it. History records that the giant stones of the temple were *literally* "thrown down" in AD 70, when the Roman general, Titus, sacked Jerusalem. It happened, not only in perfect fulfilment of this prophecy of the Lord Jesus, but also of the prophecy given by Daniel, in Dan. 9:26: "the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary". Although Futurists interpret this text as referring to a future Antichrist and what he will supposedly do to Jerusalem, this is incorrect. As I have shown in my book, *The Prophecies of Daniel*,¹⁴ it refers to what the Romans did to Jerusalem and its temple in the first century AD. Although Titus tried his best to preserve the temple, his soldiers were so angry that he could not stop them from destroying it.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, who was an eyewitness of these

events, states (as do other Jewish writers) that the city and the temple were *dug up*, and *laid level* with the ground. They state that the temple was actually *ploughed up*, by a man named Turnus (or Terentius) Rufus,¹⁵ in direct fulfilment of the prophecy given by Micah the prophet centuries before: “Zion shall be ploughed as a field” (Mic.3:12; see also Jer. 26:18); and in direct fulfilment also of the prophecy of the Lord Jesus, given here in Matthew, as well as His prophecy in Lk. 19:41-44: “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.” Language could not be clearer than this in describing the siege of Jerusalem, and then its destruction, being laid level with the ground. In fact Josephus, who was not a Christian, used virtually the same words that Jesus had used when He prophesied of its destruction! This is how he put it, after he described how Titus took Jerusalem: “Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as were of the greatest eminency... and so much of the wall as enclosed the city on the west side.... but for all the rest of the wall, it was *so thoroughly laid even with the ground* by those that dug it up *to the foundation*, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.”¹⁶

And in prophesying of the coming destruction of that magnificent temple, Jesus was teaching His disciples (then and now!) to take their eyes off such things, and look upon what really matters! Buildings do not last forever; nor do beautiful human bodies; and His saints need to look at what really does last forever, and set their affections on those things (Col. 3:1,2). “See ye not all these things?” Jesus said to them. It was as if He was saying, You wanted me to look at them, and so I do; but I do not look as you look. You look so as to admire them; but

rather you should look at them so as to be reminded of the passing, transitory nature of all earthly things. Then indeed your looking will be profitable to you.

O may *we* look with the same eyes!

v.3: *“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives”.*

The Mount of Olives was to the east of Jerusalem, and it was “over against the temple” (Mk.13:3). Thus Jesus and the disciples, sitting there, had a full view of the great building. Ezekiel the prophet, centuries before, saw the glory of the Lord move from the temple *to this very mountain*: “Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city” (Ezek. 11:22,23). And now Christ Jesus, the true glory of the Lord, had done the very same thing: He had departed from the temple, walked up the Mount of Olives, and sat down there.

And we can well imagine that as His disciples listened to Him delivering this sermon, their gaze must have often gone from His face to the magnificent temple they could clearly see, and to their beloved city of Jerusalem, much of which was also clearly visible from where they were seated. What an effect His words must have had upon them, with such a backdrop to such a sermon!

v.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?”*

We know from Mark’s Gospel that the ones who came to Him were Peter, James, John and Andrew (Mk. 13:3). And they had two questions for Jesus: *When?* and *What?* These are just like the questions asked centuries before, in Dan. 12:6,8: “And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?” and, “And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?”¹⁷ Consider these things:

In Dan. 12:6 the man clothed in linen was the Lord Christ Himself; and the angel asked him how long it would be before all these prophecies were fulfilled, just as the disciples asked the Lord, “When

shall these things be?” It is right for the Lord’s people to enquire of Him, earnestly desiring to know these things! Bible prophecy is given for our instruction, edification, and comfort. It is a very wrong attitude professing Christians have when they say things like, “I don’t concern myself with prophecy! It’s far too difficult and controversial.” The angel in Dan. 12:6 did not have this attitude, nor did the disciples in Matthew 24; and nor should any true Christian.

Then also, in Dan. 12:8 Daniel himself asked the Lord what the end of these things would be, just as, centuries later, the disciples asked Him, “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

It is very important that we properly understand what the disciples were asking the Lord here. It is because people do not understand this, that they fall for the false interpretations of this prophetic chapter which have become so common.

Their first question was: “Tell us, when shall these things be?” What things? The things He had just prophesied about: that the temple would be destroyed, and so completely that the very stones of it would be thrown down. When shall these things happen to the temple? And then there was their second question (for what they asked next was really one question, not two): “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Many make the mistake of assuming that because the disciples asked about Christ’s coming and the end of the world, they meant His *second* coming; which leads them to interpret the rest of the chapter as being all about the second coming of Christ, for they assume He was answering their question about this. But they were not thinking of any second coming at all. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ; and they believed that He would *never leave* them. At this point they had no real understanding of the fact that He would indeed be leaving them, to return a second time far in the future. They therefore had no reason to think of any second coming of His. When they asked Him about the sign of His coming, they were asking Him what the sign of His *coming in His kingdom and power* would be!

They had heard Him speak of *this* coming in His kingdom; for example, in Matt. 16:28 when He said, “Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see

the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” In this place Jesus was not referring to His second coming, but to another “coming”; a coming in power and judgment in AD 70 upon the Jewish nation! He did not come personally, visibly or physically, at that time; but from heaven, to which He had ascended, He sent forth His mighty judgment, and destroyed that nation with a terrible destruction.

But His disciples mistook His meaning. For at this time they still mistakenly believed that this coming would be when Jesus would soon establish an *earthly* kingdom, overthrowing the Roman occupiers and ruling from Jerusalem. And in this belief they were in fact merely echoing a popular Jewish notion at the time. What they were asking Him, then, was: What shall be the sign of Thy coming *to establish Thy earthly kingdom?*

They thought that, immediately after the destruction of the temple, Christ would establish an earthly kingdom. But they never once thought He would actually be leaving them, for a long time, to return to earth many centuries later!

Furthermore, they believed (as did the Jews at that time) that this earthly kingdom of the Messiah, to be set up and governed from Jerusalem, would usher in the end of this present world. And *this* was why they also asked Him, in the same breath, what the sign of His coming would be, *and* of the end of the world. As far as they were concerned, the destruction of the temple would signal the end of the world as they knew it. For when the then-present state of the Jewish nation came to an end, this would be as the end of the world to them: the end of the present age, and the ushering in of a better one.

Jesus proceeded to answer their questions; but His answers were not what they had expected. He spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the Jewish nation, which was to occur a mere four decades later; but in doing so, He spoke typically of the end of the world and His second coming, as being the antitypes of what would occur in AD 70.



CHAPTER THREE

FALSE CHRISTS

MATTHEW 24:4,5

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.

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

The same words are found in the sister-passage of Mk. 13:5,6. The disciples had just asked the Lord, “When shall these things be?” But in His answer Jesus did not tell them exactly when they would occur – for it was not for them to know such things. And this will be seen more clearly when we come to v.36. As Jesus said in Acts 1:7, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” It was not the Lord’s will to reveal the precise time of Jerusalem’s destruction; nor is it His will for the precise time of His second coming to be known either.

But as for their second question – “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” – Jesus answered in detail! For we are certainly to “understand the *signs* of the times” (Matt. 16:3). And there would indeed be a number of signs, pointing to His soon coming in judgment upon the Jewish nation; just as, indeed, there will be signs pointing to His second coming at the end of the world as well.

In reply to their question, He starts with what might at first appear a strange answer: “Take heed that no man deceive you.” Yet on reflection it can be seen how important this is to state before anything else. Believers must be very careful not to be deceived. They must guard against it, for deception, false teachers and false teachings

abound everywhere. And in particular, the Lord Jesus warned them of deceivers who would actually be *false* “*Christs*”. This is the very first “sign” He mentions of the coming judgment and destruction of the nation, and the temple.

v.5: “*For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*”

As this chapter is about events in the first century AD, leading up to the horrifying destruction of AD 70, it follows that this verse had its fulfilment then. This is contrary to Futurist doctrine, but it is true all the same. And indeed it is confirmed by Lk. 21:8, which records additional words of the Lord Jesus spoken at this time, not recorded by Matthew: “And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; *and the time draweth near*: go ye not therefore after them.” If the Lord was referring only to a much later time (His second coming), He would not have said, “the time draweth near”! Clearly, these words refer to a time not too long after He gave this prophecy. Jesus knew that men would *very shortly* arise, soon after His return to heaven in fact, in that first century already. Men who would claim to be Israel’s Messiah, the Christ, and who would succeed in deceiving many into following them, as they made promises of being Israel’s salvation, and promises about establishing an earthly kingdom.

This was what the Jews wanted to hear! They wanted a political and military Messiah, who would overthrow the Roman occupiers, establish His kingdom from Jerusalem, and the glory days of Israel’s past would return – except even better and more glorious than before. And there were deceivers who made such promises, and were able to persuade multitudes of Jews to follow them.

There is also another way to understand Lk. 21:8, where the Lord said, “the time draweth near.” There is a marginal note at this point which says that it can also be rendered as follows: “for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and, The time draweth near”.

Read this way, the Lord was saying that these would be the words of the false “Christs” who would soon arise: not only would they say, “I am Christ”; but also, “The time draws near”! They would say that the time was fast approaching when the Jews would overthrow the

Romans and be free once again.

Even when understood this way, however, it does not alter the fact that this part of the Lord's prophecy was fulfilled shortly after He spoke these words. For even taken this way, it means these false "Christs" had to arise during the time of the Roman occupation of Judea.

Of course, there had been false prophets in Israel's history before – and the Lord warned about them through His *true* prophets: for example, Jer. 23:16 and Ezek. 13:2-6. And indeed, centuries before, the Lord through Moses had prophesied that this would occur, as a test for the Jews: Deut. 13:1-3.

But this time it was different: these deceivers, who arose after the Lord Jesus returned to heaven, went a step further and claimed to fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the coming Messiah, drawing away followers after them. They were able to do this by playing on the people's heightened expectation that the Messiah was about to appear. Daniel's prophecy about the seventy weeks was very much in their minds at this time (Dan. 9:24-26). The Jewish people had a general expectation that the Messiah was about to appear, based on the calculation of this prophecy (70 x 7 days, meaning 490 years, reckoning one prophetic "day" for an actual year).¹⁸

Of course, their Messiah *had* come! But the vast majority of the Jews rejected Him, saw to it that He was crucified, and continued to look for Him. And deceivers arose who took advantage of their heightened emotions and excited expectancy, and claimed to be the Christ. The names of some of them have come down to us, both in Scripture and elsewhere: men who appeared on the scene in the four decades between the ascension of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Let us briefly take note of a number of them:

There was Simon the sorcerer. "But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries" (Acts 8:9-11). Note that he said of himself that he was "some great one". It appears that he actually claimed to be the Messiah, the Christ of God. And

when the people said, “this man is the great power of God”, they meant the Messiah, the Son of the Highest.¹⁹

There was a man named Theudas. Josephus states that this man arose during the reign of Claudius Caesar, and took his many followers to the Jordan River, which he promised to divide – *if* they took their possessions along with them. And Josephus relates that by this promise “many were deluded by his words” (which is saying precisely the same thing as the Lord Jesus did here – that these false Christs would “deceive many”!). But the governor of Judea, Cuspius Fadus, sent out some troops on horseback, killed many of Theudas’ disciples, captured others, and chopped off Theudas’ head, bringing it back in triumph to Jerusalem.²⁰

A Theudas is mentioned in Acts 5:34-36. “Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.” Was this the same Theudas as mentioned by Josephus? It certainly seems to be; but the problem is that the chronology does not harmonise. For Gamaliel said that Theudas rose up “before these days” – that is, before the time when Gamaliel spoke; whereas Josephus puts Theudas in the time of Claudius Caesar, and of the governor Cuspius Fadus, which was after the time when Gamaliel spoke these words.

There are two possible explanations. One is that Josephus got his dates and times wrong. This is possible. Josephus was a good historian, but he was not divinely inspired, and he may have got his facts wrong about this, as historians do at times. Another possible explanation is that there were in fact two men, both called Theudas, at different times.

Another one who arose was known as the Egyptian. “And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?” (Acts 21:37,38). According to the marginal note, this man arose in AD 55. History

records that he came from Egypt to Jerusalem, claimed to be a prophet, and convinced thousands to follow him to the Mount of Olives; and told them that they would see him command the walls of the city to fall, and they would obey and fall down – and then they would enter the city through the ruins, defeat the Roman garrison stationed there, and take over the government of the Jews. But he was defeated by Felix, the governor of Judea, who came against him with his Roman soldiers, assisted by the Jews themselves. The Egyptian fled, but 400 of his disciples were killed and 200 were captured. This is why the Roman chief captain asked Paul if he was that Egyptian. He was still at large, having never been caught.

According to Acts, the Roman chief captain said that the Egyptian led 4000 murderers into the wilderness. Josephus, on the other hand, wrote that he led 30 000 men *from* the wilderness *to* Jerusalem.²¹ There are those who love to take hold of things like this and question the accuracy of Holy Scripture. And yet it is very easy to reconcile these apparent contradictions (for they are only apparent, not real). Josephus was not divinely inspired, and it is possible that he made a mistake. It is equally possible that the Roman chief captain made a mistake! After all, the book of Acts simply records what he said; it does not state that what he said was absolutely accurate.

But in this case there is no need to assume that the usually very careful Josephus was in error, or that the Roman was. The Egyptian may have only taken 4000 with him *at first*, and then later his followers increased to 30 000. Or, only 4000 of the 30 000 were *murderers*. Either way, the Egyptian first took them *into* the wilderness, then later brought them back *from* the wilderness *to* the city, where the fighting occurred.

And there were others as well. There was Dositheus the Samaritan, who arose within a year after the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven. He said that he was the Christ foretold by Moses. About three years later, another Samaritan arose, claiming that he would show the people the sacred utensils which, it was said by some, had been placed by Moses in Mount Gerizim. Believing that their Messiah had come, an armed multitude gathered around this man, but he was killed by Pontius Pilate, and they were defeated.

Yet another was called Menander, who claimed that the only ones

who would be saved were those who were baptized in his name; etc. And there were other false Christs who arose during this period as well. Truly, this prophecy of the Lord Christ was fulfilled in the years between His ascension and Jerusalem's destruction: "many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."

Some have argued that only Dositheus, of all these impostors, directly *called* himself the Messiah. But the fact is that the Jews of that time were awaiting their Messiah, and their hope was that He would deliver them from the Roman yoke and "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6); and all these impostors pretended to be the fulfilment of those vain Jewish hopes. Whether they all *called* themselves the Christ or not, they were all *false Christs*. They well knew what the Jews believed them to be, and they played on it, and used it to their advantage.

And it was most just of the Lord to permit such false Christs and false prophets to arise, and deceive so many of the Jews. For they had crucified their *true* Christ, and were now given over by the Lord to be deceived by *false* Christs; they persecuted the Lord's *true* prophets, and were now given over to be deceived by *false* ones. God is not mocked. Judicial blindness was upon that nation, a just recompense for their sins.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that Jesus warned His disciples not to be deceived by these false Christs, but Luke adds the words: "go ye not therefore after them" (Lk. 21:8).

Do not follow them! Do not let them lead you astray! How necessary such warnings are, for even true Christians can, for a time, be led astray by false teachers. They must therefore be on their guard, comparing what any man claims, or teaches, with the Word of God. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try [test] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1).

However, even though this verse had its fulfilment in the first century AD, the false Christs of that time were also *types*, and *forerunners*, of a succession of men who would arise in the centuries to come, and who would be the greatest deceivers the world has ever known: *the long succession of Roman popes!* One pope at a time, yet each one claiming

to be Christ Himself on earth, precisely as Jesus said here: “For *many* shall come in my name, [each one] saying, I am Christ”. For this *is* the blasphemous claim made by the popes of Rome! Consider these shocking examples:²²

In the fourteenth century the Roman pope, Boniface VIII, issued the following statement in his Bull, *Unum Sanctum*: “that which was spoken of Christ, ‘thou hast subdued all things under his feet’, may well seem verified in me... I have the authority of the King of kings. I am all in all and above all, so that God himself and I, the vicar of God, have but one consistory, and I am able to do all that God can do. What therefore, can you make of me but God?”

Pius IX called himself Christ when he said of himself: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

Pius X said: “The pope...is Jesus Christ Himself, hidden under the veil of flesh.”

And Pius XI, in 1922, called himself “God on the earth.”

And these were not merely the sinful utterances of the popes themselves. Their followers gave the same blasphemous titles to them, as did some of the greatest theologians of the Roman Catholic institution. For example:

Pius IX’s followers described him as “the living Christ”, “the Lamb of the Vatican”, “the Voice of God.” For centuries, in fact, the pope was called, “Our Lord and God.” At times he was called “an earthly God”, and “another God on earth.” But from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries the pope was called “Our Lord God the Pope.”

Martin V was addressed, as if he was Christ Himself, in the following manner: “The most holy and most blessed, who holds the celestial jurisdiction, who is Lord over all the earth... the anointed... the ruler of the universe, the father of kings, the Light of the World”.

Thomas Aquinas, the great Roman Catholic theologian, said: “There is no difference between the pope and Jesus Christ.”

A famous Roman Catholic cardinal, Edward Manning, called the pope Christ when he wrote: “He was elevated to be, in his Divine Master’s Name, King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

During the First Vatican Council in 1870, the following statement was made: “The Pope is Christ in office, Christ in jurisdiction and power... we bow before thy voice, O Pius, as before the voice of Christ, the God of truth; in clinging to thee, we cling to Christ.”

And even as recently as 1993, when John Paul II visited Brazil, the Roman Catholic crowds sang, “King, king, John Paul is our king!” and, “You are the Christ!”²³

Now compare Matt. 24:4,5 with the prophetic Scripture pertaining to the Antichrist in 2 Thess. 2:3. The former says, “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” And the latter says, “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition”. Both passages tell believers not to be deceived. And both passages have to do with the popes of Rome! 2 Thess. 2 is a very important prophetic chapter about the Antichrist – who is none other than every pope of Rome. In v.3 he is called “the Man of Sin” and “Son of Perdition.” And just as this verse reveals that *deception* is what the Papacy is all about, so does Matt. 24:4,5!

Deception by the Roman Antichrist is the theme, also, of 2 Jn. 7: “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” The Antichrist is a deceiver! It says so in 2 Jn. 7, and it says so in 2 Thess. 2:3. The Antichrist is the Roman pope – each and every Roman pope. Jesus said in Matt. 24:5 that they “deceive *many*”; and truly, they have deceived multiplied millions of people through the centuries, and continue to deceive multiplied millions today. *Few* find the strait gate, but *many* are on the broad way (Matt. 7:13,14).

In Matt. 24:4,5, then, when Jesus speaks of deception at the hands of many coming and claiming to be Christ – which is a vital identification mark of the Antichrist – there can be no doubt that, although this text was fulfilled in the first century AD, it has also been fulfilled in the Roman Papacy. As with so much prophetic Scripture, although there is a first fulfilment of a text in one event, there is a second fulfilment in another event. Thus the same text may be used to teach or to warn about matters beyond its first fulfilment in history. And thus Matt. 24:5 can and should be used as a warning about the popes of Rome! They are in fact the antitypes of those early first-century deceivers, false Christs and prophets.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS

MATTHEW 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.

v.6: *“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled”.*

Mk. 13:7 and Lk. 21:9 are virtually identical to this verse.

This is the second sign the Lord gives concerning Jerusalem’s approaching destruction. The first one was that men would arise in the years before AD 70, claiming to be the Messiah. The second was that they would hear of wars and rumours of wars.

The “wars” refer to the insurrections, seditions, and uprisings against the Romans, which occurred in the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Jews had rejected the Lord Jesus, their Messiah; and from the time when they had Him crucified until their destruction in AD 70, they never knew peace. They had rejected the Prince of Peace and His Gospel of peace, and therefore they had war. What follows are a few examples:²⁴

About three years after the death of the Lord Jesus, there was a war between King Herod and Aretas, the king of Arabia Petraea, in which Herod’s army was defeated. And under the Roman governor Cumanus, a sedition was raised on the day of the Passover, in which 20 000 died; then in another uprising, 10 000 were killed.

When a pestilence broke out in Babylon, a great number of Jews who lived there relocated to the city of Seleucia; and there the Greeks and Syrians rose up against them, and destroyed tens of thousands of them. About five years later there was war between them at Perea and the Philadelphians, in which large numbers of Jews were killed. There was also a war between the Jews and the Samaritans, because the Samaritans had murdered a Galilean on his way to Jerusalem to keep the Passover.

At Caesaria, there was a sharp contention between the Jews and the Syrians as to who should govern the city; and when the Jews lost the appeal they made to those who granted the government to the Syrians, they rose against the Syrians, but were repelled. In that city over 20 000 Jews were massacred. But it did not end there, spreading to almost every city, town and village where Jews and Syrians lived together. In Damascus, 10 000 Jews were killed in one hour; in Scythopolis, 13 000 in one night. In Ascalon, 2000 were killed; in Ptolemais, 2000 more; and still more in Tyre, Gadara, etc.

In Alexandria, the Jews rose up against the Romans, and the Romans slaughtered 50 000 of them there, sparing neither children nor the elderly. Then later, at the siege of Jopata, some 40 000 more Jews were killed.

Finally, the entire Jewish nation rose up against the Romans, provoking a war of such magnitude that the land of Judea was drenched in blood, and Jerusalem was utterly destroyed.

And in addition to the wars provoked by the Jews, or by others against the Jews, there were also various other wars which occurred during this time in the western Roman Empire.

As for “rumours of wars”: naturally, it is difficult to demonstrate rumours from the pages of history, especially as many, perhaps most, wars are preceded by rumours of wars; so that it can safely be said that most of the wars mentioned above were preceded by rumours. But to give one example of a rumour of war which greatly troubled the Jews: they heard a rumour that the Roman emperor, Caligula, planned to erect his image in their temple; and it troubled them so greatly, knowing that they would resist him doing so, that they even neglected to till their lands. It did not come to pass in the end, but it was a most distressing rumour to them.

And yet Jesus said to His disciples: "See that ye be not troubled". The unregenerate Jews were greatly troubled by all these wars and rumours of wars. They were in a constant state of agitation, distress and rebellion. But Christians were not to be troubled by these things, for (as the verse goes on to say) the time was not yet. And even *during* these things they were not to be troubled, for their hearts were to be fixed by faith upon the Lord, trusting in Him.

Truly, in times of war and commotion Christians are not to be troubled, and they will not be when they remember that God's counsels are from eternity and cannot be changed. The child of God must walk in peace, and by faith.

Now some unbelievers might object to this part of Jesus' prophecy and say, "But there is nothing impressive about someone prophesying of wars and rumours of wars! These happen so often in the world, that *anyone* could say, 'There will be wars and rumours of wars.'"

This objection is satisfactorily answered by the following quotation, from *The Destruction of Jerusalem*, written by George Peter Holford in 1805: "If it be here objected, that, because wars are events of frequent occurrence, it would be improper to refer to supernatural foresight a successful prediction respecting them, it is replied, that much of this objection will be removed, by considering the incompetency of even statesmen themselves to foretell the condition, only for a few years, of the very nation whose affairs they administer. It is a well-known fact, that the present prime minister of Great Britain, on the very eve of the late long and destructive war with the French Republic, held out to this country a picture of fifteen successive years of peace. Indeed, the nice points on which peace and war often depend, baffle all calculations from present aspects; and a rumour of war, so loud and so alarming, as even to suspend the operations of husbandry, may terminate, as we have just seen, in nothing but rumour. Farther, let it be considered, that the wars to which this part of our Lord's prophecy referred, were to be of two kinds, and that the event corresponded accordingly; that they occurred within the period to which he had assigned them; that they fell with the most destructive severity on the Jews, to whom the prophecy at large chiefly related; and that the person who predicted them was not in the condition of a statesman, but in that of a carpenter's son!"²⁵

v.6: *“for all these things must come to pass”.*

The wars and rumours of wars, and people being greatly troubled as a result. Such things had to occur; they were predetermined by God, prophesied by Christ, and came to pass as divine punishment upon the Jews for their sins.

v.6: *“but the end is not yet.”*

The context shows that the Lord Jesus was prophesying here, primarily, of the years and events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the Jewish nation and state. And seeing as these things were “the beginning of sorrows” (see v.8), but the end was not yet, this teaches the Christian to understand that even when terrible things occur, there may be worse things yet to come – and he should therefore be prepared for them. As Jeremiah says: “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?” (Jer. 12:5).

And yet, even though the things in this verse were fulfilled in the first century, they certainly *typified* the period near the end of the world! For as the end of the world approaches, we are certainly hearing of many wars and rumours of wars; and certainly many are troubled and agitated and fearful because of these things. Although such things have occurred throughout the centuries, they appear to be intensifying as the end approaches (or at least, they are reported on with greater frequency now). And this is despite the existence of the United Nations, which so many in the world pin their hopes on as the organisation to bring peace to the world. There are dozens of wars being fought around the world at this very moment, and this has been the case throughout the existence of the UN. It has not helped in the least, and in truth it never will.

v.7: *“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”.*

Not only would there be wars and commotions within the land of the Jews and elsewhere, between Jews and other nations, but also between various nations of the known world at that time. There were wars within the Roman Empire, between Otho and Vitellius; between Vitellius and Vespasian; etc.; and the Jewish nation rose up against

the Samaritans, Syrians and Romans. And in God's time, the Romans rose up against the Jews, and destroyed them. The verse, then, was precisely fulfilled, in those years before AD 70. Examples have already been given, when examining v.6, of nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom.

v.7: *“And there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.”*

Consider, firstly, the famines. One of these is mentioned in the Scriptures: “And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar” (Acts 11:27,28). Although this terrible famine spread through Greece and into Italy, Judea suffered the most from it, and especially Jerusalem, with many dying. It was so terrible that Helena, queen of Adiabena, who was in Jerusalem at the time, commanded that large supplies of grain should be sent from Alexandria. Her son, Izates, gave huge sums of money to the governors of Jerusalem, to aid with the famine relief. And because the Lord, through his prophet Agabus, had foretold this famine, the Christians among the Gentiles sent relief to their suffering Jewish brethren in the faith.

This famine, however, was not the only one during the reign of Claudius. This one occurred in the fourth year of his reign, lasted a very long time and was very widespread; but there was also a famine in Rome and other parts of Italy during the first year of his reign, and yet another in the eleventh year.

When the Romans besieged and took several cities of Judea and Galilee prior to the taking of Jerusalem itself, famines occurred. And then of course there was terrible famine during the time of the actual siege of Jerusalem, when the city was surrounded by the Roman army. Jeremiah the prophet, writing of an earlier siege, used language which was descriptive of the siege by the Romans as well: “They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field. The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people” (Lam. 4:9,10).

The Lord next mentioned pestilences. These accompany almost all famines, and doubtless accompanied most, if not all, of the ones mentioned above. History records that in Babylon in AD 40, where many Jews lived, pestilence broke out, and was so bad that multitudes of Jews fled to Seleucia. And in Rome in AD 65, a pestilence resulted in the deaths of multitudes there. During this period there were also other pestilences in various parts of the Roman Empire.

And once Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans, it did not take long before pestilences broke out in that suffering city. These were caused by various factors, such as the crowded conditions (so many Jews being in the city at the time), the masses of unburied dead, and of course the famine that prevailed.

And as for earthquakes in various places, history records that during Claudius' reign there was an earthquake at Rome; there was a very destructive one at Apamea in Syria, a place where many Jews lived, and in the same year there was one at Crete; and others at Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, and Samos, with Jews dwelling in all these places; there were earthquakes in various cities of Asia during the Emperor Nero's time (not long before AD 70), in the cities of Phrygia, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, and Campania. Also, during the reign of Galba, the city of Rome experienced another one. In addition, when the Idumeans were excluded from Jerusalem not long before the siege of the city began, Josephus records that "there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, and continual lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put into this disorder; and any one would guess *that these wonders foreshewed some grand calamities that were coming.*"²⁶

These words of the Lord Jesus, then, were fulfilled in the years before and during Jerusalem's destruction. Mk. 13:8 says the same thing. Lk. 21:11, however, adds something to the famines, pestilences and earthquakes, which the Lord also said: "and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven." This is very significant, because there truly were fearful sights and great signs from heaven at the

time! Josephus gathered together the facts about the main ones which were witnessed, and in doing so, provided this testimony of the Jews' stubbornness and blindness: "they did not attend, nor give credit, to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them."²⁷ With the exception of one, which was obviously fabulous, and which will be dealt with a little further on, these signs were as follows, as related by Josephus:²⁸

"Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year." It was not really a comet, because comets are not stationary, but it certainly was a heavenly event, which must have been absolutely terrifying to the citizens of Jerusalem. And the fact that it resembled a sword was a very fit emblem of the approaching destruction of the city.

The following signs which he recorded all occurred just prior to the Jewish war:

"[O]n the eighth day of the month Xanthicus [Nisan], and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day-time; which light lasted for half an hour. This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskilful, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes as to portend those events that followed immediately upon it." Clearly this was a miraculous sign, because it was confined to one spot.

"Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner [court of the temple], which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night. Now, those that kept watch in the temple came thereupon running to the captain of the temple, and told him of it; who then came up thither, and not without great difficulty was able to shut the gate again. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open them the gate of happiness. But the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies. So these publicly declared, that this signal foreshewed the desolation that was coming upon them."

Then comes this amazing sign: “Besides these, a few days after that feast [the feast of the Passover], on the one-and-twentieth day of the month Artemisius [Jyar], a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities.” Of course we are not to believe that these were *actual* chariots and men, but rather angelic beings, sent by the Lord to fulfil His prophetic Word. As it occurred before the sun set, it was not a nocturnal and natural occurrence, such as the *aurora borealis*; and nor was it merely imagined by a few people, for it was seen in various parts of the land.

Another astonishing sign: “Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, ‘Let us remove hence.’” Imagine the fear and dread this had upon the priests! “And accordingly, before the period for celebrating this feast returned, the Jewish war had commenced, and in the space of three years afterwards, Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman army, the temple converted into a citadel, and its sacred courts streaming with the blood of human victims.”²⁹

Finally, there was this sign: “But, what is still more terrible, there was one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a plebeian, and an husbandman, who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that feast whereon it is our custom for every one to make tabernacles to God in the temple, began on a sudden to cry aloud, ‘A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people!’ This was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city.

“However, certain among the most eminent among the populace had great indignation at this dire cry of his, and took up the man, and gave him a great number of severe stripes; yet did not he either say anything

for himself, or anything peculiar to those that chastised him, but still he went on with the same words which he cried before. Hereupon our rulers supposing, as the case proved to be, that this was a sort of divine fury in the man, brought him to the Roman procurator – where he was whipped till his bones were laid bare; yet did he not make any supplication for himself, nor shed any tears, but turning his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, at every stroke of the whip his answer was, ‘Woe, woe to Jerusalem!’ And when Albinus (for he was then our procurator) asked him, Who he was? and whence he came? and why he uttered such words? he made no manner of reply to what he said, but still did not leave off his melancholy ditty, till Albinus took him to be a madman, and dismissed him.

“Now, during all the time that passed before the war began, this man did not go near any of the citizens, nor was seen by them while he said so; but he every day uttered these lamentable words, as if it were his premeditated vow, ‘Woe, woe to Jerusalem!’ Nor did he give ill words to any of those that beat him every day, nor good words to those that gave him food; but this was his reply to all men, and indeed no other than a melancholy presage of what was to come. This cry of his was the loudest at the festivals; and he continued this ditty for seven years and five months, without growing hoarse, or being tired therewith, until the very time that he saw his presage in earnest fulfilled in our siege, when it ceased; for, as he was going round upon the wall, he cried out with his utmost force, ‘Woe, woe to the city again, and to the people, and to the holy house!’ And just as he added at the last, – ‘Woe, woe to myself also!’ there came a stone out of one of the [Roman] engines, and smote him, and killed him immediately: and as he was uttering the very same presages, he gave up the ghost.”

The fact that this man spoke this way for seven years and five months means that he started in AD 62, when (as Josephus relates) there were no signs of the city’s impending destruction, and all was peace and prosperity within its walls.

There were prophets in the New Testament Church, for the gift of prophecy was specifically given at that time, as the Scriptures make abundantly clear; but this Jesus the son of Ananus was most definitely *not* a Christian prophet. Yet the sovereign Lord, who in the past spoke through Balaam’s ass, could certainly speak through any instrument He chose.

What are we to make of all these things, as recorded by Josephus (and some of them were also recorded by Tacitus)? We accept that Josephus was a Jew, not a Christian, not divinely inspired, and that he could make mistakes. And as was stated earlier, we deliberately left out one of the signs which he mentions, the reason being that it certainly was a fable; for he wrote, “At the same festival also [the feast of the Passover and unleavened bread], a heifer, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple.” This was most assuredly an outright fable, even though there were many Jews who believed it at the time. But although Josephus erred in including this nonsensical story, this does not mean that he erred in recording the *other* signs and sights! In fact, even if one or two of the other ones were false as well, would this mean *all* of them were? Certainly not. For we have the divinely inspired words of the Lord Jesus, that “fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven”; so there had to be *some* which were absolutely genuine, to fulfil His prophetic Word. Also, we must never forget that God had performed numerous miracles before, in the heavens and on earth, as recorded in the Old Testament, and we accept those as genuine; why not at least some of these? After all, signs and wonders were still occurring in the first century AD.

These events (either some or most of them) fulfilled Christ’s prediction, and are entirely in keeping with how the Lord worked in ages past.

Now again: although, from the evidence given above, it is perfectly clear that all these things had their fulfilment back then, in the first century AD, it is nevertheless true that they *typified* the times preceding the second coming of Christ to this world. For although these things have often been experienced through the centuries, there appears to be an intensification of them as the end of the world approaches: nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, famines, pestilences, earthquakes. I say there appears to be an intensification of them; for even if they are not actually intensifying in frequency and power, they are certainly being *reported* far more frequently, thanks to the mass media, giving the impression of there being a great increase in such things.

v.8: *“All these are the beginning of sorrows.”*

The same words are found in Mk. 13:8.

Like a woman in travail, these pangs were painful and terrible, but they were not the worst of what was coming. They were merely a prelude to the utter destruction of the Jewish nation; a foretaste of what was still to come.

In our own day, Futurists look at what appear to be the increasing number of earthquakes, famines, wars, etc., and take these things as being important signs of the end of the world; but they err in this. They are giving too much weight to these things. Yes, they may be intensifying, or at least the media’s reporting of them gives the impression that there is an intensification of them; but because the world has always experienced these things and always will, they are not the most important signs of the Lord’s return, and believers must not be troubled by them. There are far greater things to which we need to give due regard.



CHAPTER FIVE

PERSECUTION

MATTHEW 24:9,10

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.

v.9: *“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you”.*

“Then”; meaning in the first century AD already, at the same time as the things of verses 6-8 began to occur, before the destruction of the Jewish state, city and temple in AD 70, persecution of Christians occurred.

When Jesus delivered this great prophecy of Matthew 24, His disciples still expected that He was about to establish a kingdom on earth, which He would rule from Jerusalem. But instead He told them to expect great trouble and persecution. And it came to pass exactly as He foretold, as recorded in the book of Acts: Peter and John were delivered up, scourged and imprisoned (Acts 3-5); Stephen was stoned (Acts 7); James the brother of John was killed with the sword (Acts 12:1,2); Peter was again imprisoned (Acts 12:4,5); Paul was imprisoned often, scourged often, beaten with rods often, stoned (Acts 13-28; 1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 11:23-27); Peter died violently (Jn. 21:18,19); and indeed it appears, from such historical information as has come down to us through the centuries, that most of the other apostles were martyred as well. Much of this persecution occurred before the destruction of Jerusalem.

And in addition to the apostles and other ministers, multitudes of ordinary Christians suffered all kinds of afflictions, tribulations and persecutions in those times. Paul himself, before his conversion,

persecuted many of them mercilessly (Acts 8:1-3; 26:9-11), and Christians continued to suffer persecution in the years that followed. Finally, about two years before the Jewish war, Nero Caesar began a terrible persecution of the Christians, inflicting upon them “punishments exquisitely painful”, according to Tacitus.

v.9: “*and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.*”

This part of the verse is virtually identical to Jesus’ words in Matt. 10:22: “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake”. This hatred was directed against them, be it well noted, *not* because they were rebels against the civil authority, for they most certainly were not, being taught by their Lord and the Scriptures to obey the authorities; but merely for being Christians, who sought to live as Christ the Lord had lived.

They would not only be hated by the Jews, but as they went out into the world with the Gospel they would be hated by the Gentile nations as well. And indeed the book of Acts shows that as the apostles preached the Gospel, both Jews and Gentiles opposed them because they loved and followed the Lord Jesus Christ. Within only a few decades it was said of the Christian faith, “as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against” (Acts 28:22). The opposition became so great that various calamities were blamed on the Christians! For example, they were blamed for the fire in Rome, at the time of Nero Caesar. Truly, they were hated throughout the known world. Hated by the Jews, hated by the Gentiles. When it came to persecuting Christians, Jews and Gentiles were in full agreement.

Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, said: “I asked them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it, I asked them a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; and those who persevered I commanded to be led away to death.”

Matthew simply gives these words of the Lord Jesus: “ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake”. But in the sister-passage in Mark, some further words of His at this point are given. Mk. 13:9-13 says: “But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they

shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Thus Mark records Jesus' words at this time in more detail. However, at times Jesus repeated what He had taught before, so that His disciples would not forget His words; and what He taught on this occasion, as recorded by Mark, He also taught on an earlier occasion in His ministry, as recorded in Matt. 10:17-22: "But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."

Mk. 13:10 says, "this gospel must first be published among all nations" – words which are found in Matt. 24:14, showing to us very plainly that one Gospel account provides what another leaves out. However, as we are working our way consecutively through Matthew 24, we will examine this verse in its place in this chapter.

Let us turn to the sister-passage in Luke's Gospel: "But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake."

Luke's account is very similar to Mark's, but it provides a very important extra detail. In v.12 Jesus says, "But *before* all these, they shall lay their hands on you", etc. Before all what? In the verses preceding v.12, we have Jesus referring to the events preceding the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which we have already studied: the coming of false Christs, wars and commotions, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, pestilences. And then Jesus says, "But *before* all these", you shall be persecuted! This reveals, beyond all doubt, that these words of His refer to the persecutions the *early* Christians endured, at the hands of Jews and Gentiles, *prior to AD 70!*

Matt. 24:9, then, was fulfilled both *before* the things of verses 2-8 occurred, and *during* them. For Lk. 21:12 says that it was before, and Matt 24:9 says, "*Then*". And the book of Acts bears this out: the early Christians suffered persecution *before* these signs began to be fulfilled (for they suffered persecution from the very beginning of the Church), and also *during* them.

But again, although these things were certainly fulfilled at that time, they also typified what will occur as the end of the world approaches! For just as it was as the destruction of the Jewish nation approached in the first century, so too as the end of the world approaches, the hatred of the world for Christians grows and grows.

Worldwide, Christians are facing unprecedented persecution. And it is happening not just in eastern countries, or Muslim ones, or Communist ones, but in the western countries as well – including the once-Protestant lands, such as the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, etc. Even these lands, which in past centuries were greatly influenced by the Gospel, are casting off all restraints and persecuting professing Christians. But this is exactly what was prophesied in God's Word, that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13).

Then too, in a very real sense, Matt. 24:9 has been fulfilled *throughout* the Gospel age – the past 2000 years! So again, we have the primary fulfilment of this verse in the first century AD; but we also have the fact that it typifies the situation at the very end of the world, in addition to the fact that these words are applicable to Christians in *all* ages. They are a warning to believers at all times in the history of the

Christian Church, so that they may *prepare* for what they must endure in this fallen world. For “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12); “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

v.10: “*And then shall many be offended*”.

Many, who professed to be Christians when things went quite well, were “offended”: they fell away from their profession of faith – they apostatised – when they saw the persecutions and sufferings of the apostles and other Christians, or when they experienced persecution themselves. Tacitus, writing of Nero’s persecution of Christians, states that “several were seized, who confessed, and by their discovery a great multitude of others were convicted and barbarously executed.”

Apostates are not true Christians who fall away and lose their salvation, which Arminians teach it is possible to do; for a true Christian *cannot* fall away finally and completely, but will persevere to the end (Jn. 6:37; 10:28,29; Rom. 8:30; Phil. 1:6). An apostate is one who merely *professes* to be a Christian for a time, but is not one in truth. In time he falls away from the faith he professed, but never possessed in the heart. Matthew Henry correctly stated: “Many will follow Christ in the sunshine, who will shift for themselves, and leave him to do so too, in the cloudy dark day. They like their religion while they can have it cheap, and sleep with it in a whole skin; but, if their profession cost them anything, they quit it presently.”³⁰

v.10: “*and shall betray one another*”.

What Matthew records here in just a few words, Mark and Luke, in the sister-passages, do so with more detail, as we have already seen. Mark says, “Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death” (Mk. 13:12). Luke says, “And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death” (Lk. 21:16).

Many of those who departed from the faith became traitors, telling the persecutors where the Christians were, what their names were, etc. This is why Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 11:26 that he was “in perils among false brethren”. The wolves may hide beneath their sheepskins for a time, but eventually their true nature is revealed.

v.10: “*and shall hate one another.*”

True Christians did not hate the false brethren, nor of course did they hate one another; but the false brethren hated the true Christians, and supported those who persecuted them.

In a time of extreme persecution, many who may even be *true* Christians may for a time weaken and betray their brethren. There is only so much the flesh can take, and it is not for those who sit behind desks and write about these things, nor for those who relax in comfortable armchairs and read about them, to criticise those who experienced terrible tortures and suffering in ways to which so many modern Christians are strangers, and cracked under the strain of it all. Our hearts should overflow with pity, compassion and sadness, to think of our brethren enduring sufferings so cruel and hideous. Of these, however, the Lord was not speaking here, but rather of those *false* professing “Christians” who, becoming offended, betrayed and hated one another.

Yet although this verse was fulfilled in the apostolic age, it has also been fulfilled throughout the history of the Church, and it is still being fulfilled today. And as the end of the world draws near, persecution is increasing worldwide, as enemies of the truth close in on the “camp of the saints” and “the beloved city” (Rev.20:9).

Tragically, numerous times the persecution has come from family members: brother betraying brother, children betraying parents, parents betraying children – yes, even unto death at times! Such is the devil’s hatred against the people of God, that he destroys even the natural ties that exist within families, and love is replaced with hatred.



CHAPTER SIX

FALSE PROPHETS

MATTHEW 24:11

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

v.11: “*And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.*”

False prophets are men who claim to speak by divine inspiration; by the spirit of prophecy; but they are liars, for the Lord does not speak through them. This certainly happened in the first century AD, in the decades between the ascension of the Lord Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem, when false prophets arose from within the churches. Not only did Jesus prophesy about it, but so did Paul when he warned, “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30); and so did John when he wrote, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1).

Of course, if a man arises, *today*, who claims to be a prophet of the Lord, he is a liar, for the gift of prophecy is no longer given! Prophets, like apostles, laid the doctrinal foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20); but by the end of the first century AD the New Testament Scriptures were complete: “that which is perfect” (the Scriptures) had been given, and with their completion the prophetic gift came to an end (1 Cor. 13:8-12).³¹ But prior to AD 70 (and even for a couple of decades afterwards), the New Testament was not yet complete, and therefore the Lord was still giving prophets to the churches, who gave forth the very words of the Lord by prophecy (see Eph. 4:11; Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32). This meant, however, that *false* prophets could arise, claiming to give the very words of the Lord even though the Lord was not speaking through them. And they certainly deceived *many*, just as the Lord predicted here in Matt. 24:11. Many were led astray by their

false utterances.

This verse, then, was fulfilled in the first century AD. But it is also true that as the centuries went by, *vast numbers* of other false prophets arose – and most especially, the *Roman Catholic priests*, who have deceived millions!

To understand this, we must turn to another great prophecy, that of Rev. 13:11-15. We are not going to examine this prophecy in great detail, for that would take us beyond the scope of this present study; but nevertheless, some exposition is necessary here:

A symbolic “Beast” is described. It is the second Beast of this great prophetic chapter, and we are told, “he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon” (v.11). It was, therefore, a Beast *pretending* to be a Lamb, but was in fact a satanic counterfeit. It wanted to give the impression that it was like Christ the Lamb, innocent and harmless and pure. But it was a terrible Beast, disguised as a Lamb so as to deceive!

The Lord Jesus Christ gave us this important warning: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). By false prophets, Jesus meant they would be false servants of Christ; men pretending to be the *ministers* of Christ, but seeking to harm the Lord’s flock by disguising themselves as sheep. They would be ravening wolves, the deadliest enemies of the true sheep of the Lord, desiring only to tear and devour them.

This all fits with what the Lord said in our text: “And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many.”

Paul warned of them, also, in Acts 20:29: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.” And he wrote of them in 2 Cor. 11:13-15.

Peter warned of them in 2 Pet. 2:1-3: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies”.

And John wrote of them in 1 Jn. 4:1-3: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” And note the connection of these false prophets to the *Antichrist*, in his next words: “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that

Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

Rev. 13:11 speaks of a Beast with two horns like a Lamb. A false prophet is a wolf in sheep’s clothing; a wolf is a wild beast; and a wolf in sheep’s clothing is the same as a beast pretending to be a lamb. When, therefore, we let Scripture interpret Scripture, it becomes very evident that the Beast pretending to be a Lamb in Rev. 13:11 is nothing less than a great *false prophet!*

And indeed, this is precisely what this second Beast of Revelation 13 is called, elsewhere in the same book. Rev. 16:13: “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet”; and Rev. 19:20: “And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image”. We know that this False Prophet is one and the same with the second Beast in Revelation 13, because it is written that this False Prophet wrought miracles before the first Beast, with which he deceived them that had received the mark; and this is precisely what it says of the second Beast in Rev. 13:13,14.

It is beyond the scope of this book to go into this in detail here, but I have elaborated on this fact in various writings and sermons,³² with a wealth of evidence, that the *first* Beast of Revelation 13 is the Roman Papacy, and its ruling head, each and every pope of Rome, is the biblical Antichrist. And the *second* Beast, the False Prophet, which serves the Roman Antichrist, is not a single man, but a *group* of men who are, *collectively*, referred to in prophetic Scripture as the False Prophet, and who work for the Papal Antichrist.

The False Prophet is none other than the *Roman Catholic priesthood!* It is that body of men who serve the popes of Rome, supporting each and every one of the popes of Rome as the “Vicar of Christ”, or the Antichrist.

When one considers all the Scriptures which speak of false prophets, pretending to be the servants of Christ, with all the descriptions of them given in the New Testament, and when one puts all these Scriptures together and applies them to the entire priesthood of Rome as a body,

what we have, collectively, is the False Prophet! A vast army of men, devoted to the pope of Rome, doing his bidding throughout the world.

Pre-eminently, then, when given its second application, the false prophets of Matt. 24:11 are the priests of the iniquitous religious system of Rome. But in addition today, there are also the many false prophets within the Charismatic movements, both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant branches: men (and women) who *falsely claim* to be prophets, and to give forth utterances which they deceptively declare to be the very words of the Lord.

And in addition, there are also all kinds of cults which have their own false prophets as well, making all kinds of astounding claims.

Truly, then, false prophets abound in our day, and deceive many!



CHAPTER SEVEN

ENDURING TO THE END

MATTHEW 24:12,13

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.

v.12: “*And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*”

Abounding iniquity refers to such things as the love of the world; the hatred and persecution of believers by wicked men; the hatred and treachery of apostates; the heresies of false teachers; and the iniquity of society in general, including the iniquity of many who merely profess to be Christians.

This was certainly the situation as the year AD 70 approached; it has been the case ever since, to varying degrees at various times in history; and it is definitely the case today. There is, today, a massive apostasy from the faith, as the end of the world and the second coming of Christ draws near. As a result of abounding iniquity, the hearts of many who profess to be the Lord's people grow cold, and they *fall away*: they *apostatise* from the faith they profess to have, but do not have in truth.

The love of the world is one aspect of iniquity which causes many to forsake Christ and the truth. One need only think of men such as Demas, of whom Paul wrote, “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). The love of the world is a powerful thing! It has an irresistible attraction for multitudes, and nothing but the grace of God can break this attraction. Many, who make a profession of Christianity, who seem to start well, fall away because of abounding iniquity, which causes their hearts to grow cold.

The persecution of Christians by evil men is another aspect of iniquity, which fills many who profess to be Christians with fear, causing them to forsake Christ and the truth. One need only think of those who forsook Paul at his first answer before Nero Caesar: “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge” (2 Tim. 4:16). Men do this because they do not really know the truth of the Gospel, and have never experienced the reality of it in their hearts. They merely claim to be converted – for a time. Their love waxes cold because they cannot abide the heat of persecution.

And even the love of a *true* Christian may grow cold, although it is not lost forever! This is clear from Rev. 2:2-4: the believers in Ephesus left their first love. A time of abounding iniquity is always a time of abating love. For as iniquity swirls around the Christian, certainly in society and often even in the professing Church, he can become cold for a time.

Oh how every true believer has to be on guard against this! If they are not careful, then when all of society around them is iniquitous, love for the world may grow strong in their hearts as well. They may eventually (if they are not constantly vigilant) get sucked into the love of the world, compromise with the world, and grow cold in their love for their Lord and Saviour.

Also, their love to the brethren may cool somewhat, during a time of abounding iniquity. Why is this? It is because of the apostasy, the falling away, of many who once claimed to be Christians. Such departures from the faith may cause the true Christian to be uncertain about who is a sincere and genuine believer and brother and who is not. It was so back then in the first century AD, and it is so today. We see many apparently start to run the race, who then fall away; and as the true Christian sees so many spiritual casualties behind him, he may grow suspicious, even, of *true* brethren, and his love to them may grow cold as well.

This is why Heb. 10:25 says, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” What “day” is this? We may certainly understand Paul to be meaning the fast-approaching day of the Lord’s judgment upon Jerusalem, and Jerusalem’s destruction; for he was writing to Hebrew Christians, and

exhorting them to assemble regularly for worship, to exhort one another to love and to good works, and to do so with even more urgency as that fateful day drew nearer. But also, we may certainly apply it to Christ's *second coming*. As we see the day of the Lord's return approaching, we must not forsake the assembly of the saints, but must constantly and increasingly exhort one another to love and to good works.

And yet it is important to take note of this: the love of *many* grows cold, not the love of *all!* There are those who never bow to Baal, even in the worst of times – even though they are few compared with the many who do. Let this be an encouragement to all true saints in these dark days!

v.13: “*But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*”

The same words are found in the sister-passage in Mk. 13:13. Jesus also said the same thing on another occasion, in Matt. 10:22. His teaching here has been mutilated by many preachers, and consequently it has been very misunderstood by many professing Christians.

“Enduring to the end” does not mean someone who is truly saved can lose his salvation! This is how it is so often expounded by Arminian preachers. Their belief that salvation is the choice of one's supposed free will leads them naturally to the belief that a truly saved person may (if he is not careful) lose his salvation – that one who is a child of God today may become a child of the devil again tomorrow. They point to this verse and say, “You have to endure to the end of your life, otherwise you will not be saved!”

But the Bible teaches the glorious doctrine which we call the Perseverance of the Saints. A true Christian *will always* endure to the end of his life, through all trials, and thus be saved. Having been saved by the almighty power of God, he will never again be lost. It is utterly impossible. Once in Christ, he is in Him forever. The Lord keeps those whom He saves. He does not lose them to Satan again. This lovely truth is taught in many places in the Scriptures, such as Jn. 6:37; 10:28,29; Rom. 8:30; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:5,9; 2 Pet. 1:10.

What, then, is the meaning of this verse? It means that he who shall endure to the end of his life in his profession of faith in Christ, despite persecution directed at him, despite false teachers trying to lead him astray, despite sinfulness all around him, etc., shall be saved with an

everlasting salvation; for his endurance to the end is not the cause of his salvation, but the evidence that he was truly saved by Christ!

A man does not save himself, and he does not keep himself in a state of salvation by his own strength or endurance. He is saved by the *Lord*, and it is the *Lord* who keeps him. But a very important evidence that he is truly saved is that he endures to the end! This demonstrates that he was truly converted in the first place.

There is a future aspect to salvation, as well as a present one. Believers are saved, right now – but there is a sense in which salvation is still future as well: not only the redemption of their bodies at the resurrection, but also the salvation of their souls. Their souls are redeemed right now; their bodies have yet to be redeemed; and there is also the future salvation of their souls in heaven. The Lord, then, was meaning that if the believer endures to the end, this is an evidence that he was truly saved; and then he will enjoy the final aspect of his salvation, the redemption of his body and eternal life in heaven. See Rom. 2:6,7.

“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:38,39). The elect of God persevere to the saving of the soul! Even when, at times, it appears to the outward sight that most are apostatising, the Lord always has a remnant, those who are truly saved, who persevere to the end, and thus are saved with an everlasting salvation.

And of course, this verse speaks just as powerfully to Christians near the end of the world’s history (as we are now), as to those of the first century –and, for that matter, to those throughout all ages. The Lord always has a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 11:5).



CHAPTER EIGHT

THE GOSPEL PREACHED IN ALL THE WORLD

MATTHEW 24:14

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.

v.14: *“And this gospel of the kingdom”.*

The word “Gospel” means the “glad tidings”; the good news of salvation. And the Gospel, which was preached by Christ, then by His apostles, and by His ministers through the ages, is called the Gospel of the kingdom, because it tells of Christ’s kingdom of grace and glory; because those who receive it are brought into the kingdom of God’s dear Son; and because it prepares them for entering into heaven. Thus the Gospel of Christ establishes Christ’s kingdom in the heart; it secures our place in His kingdom in this world, as well as in the next.

v.14: *“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations”.*

This is one of the main reasons why Futurists mistakenly believe this chapter is all about events just prior to the second coming of Christ, rather than events prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century. For they read this verse and say, “Well, this hasn’t happened yet! The Gospel has not yet reached every nation and every tribe; it has not yet been preached in all the world, to all nations, as the Lord said it would be. When, therefore, it says that the end will come after it has been preached in all the world, it means the end of the world.”

This interpretation can look very plausible, on the surface. But we must look deeper. The all-important context must always be examined. We have seen, beyond all doubt, that Jesus was speaking of events to occur in the years leading up to His judgment of the Jewish nation in AD 70. And this verse is no different. The Lord had mentioned

signs which would indicate, to the Christians alive at that time, that the judgment and destruction of the Jewish nation was fast approaching. The first sign was many coming in His Name and claiming to be Christ. The second was the wars and rumours of wars, nation against nation, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in divers place. The third sign was the fact that Christians would be delivered up to be afflicted, and killed; being hated of all nations for the sake of their Lord and Saviour. The fourth was that many false prophets would arise, deceiving many. The fifth was that the love of many would wax cold, because iniquity would abound. And here in v. 14 He gave the next sign of the impending destruction of Jerusalem: the preaching of the Gospel in all the nations of the world! “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations”.

In what we call His Great Commission, in Mk. 16:15, Jesus commanded His disciples: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” And in v. 20 of the same chapter we see them doing precisely that: “And they went forth, *and preached every where*”. First they went to the Jews, but as the book of Acts shows, after the Jews rejected the Gospel they began to take it to the Gentile nations as well.

But the stumbling-block for many is that Matt. 24:14 says the Gospel would be preached in *all the world*, for a witness unto *all nations*. Surely, they say, this did not happen in the four decades between the Lord’s ascension to heaven and the destruction of Jerusalem!

Ah, but it did! The Scriptures themselves tell us that the Gospel *was* preached, during that period of time in the first century AD, in all the world. But in order to understand this, we must understand the meaning of the word, “all”. It is used in different ways, in the Scriptures.

For example, Matt. 3:5 says that “Jerusalem, and *all* Judaea, and *all* the region round about Jordan”, went to John the Baptist to be baptized; but we are not to understand by these words that *every single human being* in those places went to be baptized. Not all of them were converted, as is very clear from the Gospel accounts, and John only baptized those who repented of their sins; nor did he baptize infants, and many in those places must have been infants (just as they are anywhere in the world at any given time). The meaning of Matt.

3:5 is, simply, that a *great many* of the people from those places went to be baptized. This is how we relate such matters in common speech, and this is how the word “all” is used in this place. “All” is used as meaning “many”.

Another example: when it says in Lk. 2:1 that “there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that *all the world* should be taxed”, we know of course that it means all the *Roman* world; all the world that fell under the dominion of Caesar. It did not mean North and South America, Australia, Greenland, most of Africa, or most of Asia! It was limited to the Roman Empire. But that great empire was so vast, covering so much of the known world at that time, that the Romans boasted of it enveloping the whole world.

One more example: Rev. 13:3 says that “all the world wondered after the beast.” But this does not mean every single human being. It means many; a very large number.

Therefore, in the light of these and other texts of Scripture, Matt. 24:14 means that the Gospel would be preached in the nations which fell under the vast Roman Empire, and even possibly in some nations which lay outside Rome’s dominion, during those four decades between the ascension of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem; but during this time it would not (for example) be preached to the people living in such far-off parts of the world as the interior of Africa, or the Americas. Many parts of the world were not even known to exist to the people who lived under the Roman Empire at that time.

And the Scriptures tell us that the Gospel *was* indeed proclaimed in “all the world” (taken in this sense) before AD 70! Let us hear what they say:

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom. 1:8). The Christians in the church at Rome were well-known throughout the whole of the Roman Empire – which Paul here calls “the whole world.”

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (Rom.10:17,18). Does this mean that every single part of the globe had received missionaries by the time Paul wrote this epistle? No; but it means that by the time he wrote it, the Gospel had been taken to all the parts of

the *known* world, or at least to all the parts of the *Roman* world – the Roman Empire.

“For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world” (Col.1:5,6). Paul meant that by the time he wrote this epistle, the Gospel had been taken into all the parts of the Roman Empire, and even, in all likelihood, into some places which did not fall under the dominion of Caesar.

“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” (Col. 1:23). Note the close similarity between these words and those of the Lord Jesus when He commissioned His servants to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15). And now Paul writes that it had been done! By the time he wrote this, the Gospel had been “preached to every creature which is under heaven”. Obviously he did *not literally* mean that it had been preached to every single human being. That was not possible, and in fact has never been the case at any time in history. People are dying every minute, and people are being born every minute; and at any given time, there are always vast numbers who have never heard the Gospel. As the apostles entered into any large city, for example, people would either have died just before they arrived there to preach, or babies would have just been born, or both (as is true in any city at any time). There would have been those who were too young to understand the Gospel, those who were too infirm, and others who had no interest in hearing it anyway.

Paul simply meant that the Gospel had been preached *everywhere*, throughout the entire known world of that time, and to all nations of men, Gentiles as well as Jews; for “every creature” could mean, in the Jewish mind, the rest of the world: the Gentile world. Thus, “preach the Gospel to every creature” would mean, to them, preach the Gospel to the Gentiles as well as the Jews; preach the Gospel in Gentile nations and not only in the nation of Judea.

A text which casts further light on Col. 1:23 is this: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Tit. 2:11). “*All men*”: not to the Jews only, but to Gentiles as well.

From all these passages, therefore, it is very evident that the Gospel

of Christ, the Gospel of the kingdom, *was* preached in all the known world before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year AD 70. The very thing which the Jews wanted to prevent by crucifying Christ, had come to pass! “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” (Jn.11:47,48). First, “*all men* will believe on him”: this came to pass, understanding it in the limited sense of the word, “all”, as used in various Scriptures, as shown above; for large numbers of Jews *did* believe on Him, and vast numbers of Gentiles later. And second, “the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation”: this came to pass exactly, in that fateful year of AD 70.

What a wonderful testimony of the truth of the Gospel, and of the truth of this prophecy of the Lord Jesus! How utterly opposed to all human reason or expectation, that His Gospel would, within the space of forty short years, spread over the whole known world. No mere man could have predicted this. It was a message without political backing, without the use of violent persuasion, and without any earthly incentives to offer its followers. It went against all reason, all logic, and the fulfilment would have appeared, to natural sight, an impossibility. “Thus completely was fulfilled a prediction contrary to every conclusion that could have been grounded on moral probability, and to the accomplishment of that which every kind of impediment was incessantly opposed. The reputed son of a mechanic instructs a few simple fishermen in a new dispensation destitute of worldly incentives, but full of self-denials, sacrifices, and sufferings, and tells them that in about forty years it should spread over all the world. It spreads accordingly; and, in defiance of the exasperated bigotry of the Jews, and of all the authority, power, and active opposition of the Gentiles, is established, within that period, in all the countries into which it penetrates. Can any one doubt but that the prediction and its fulfillment were equally divine?”³³

As to why the Lord said that the Gospel would be preached in all the world “for a witness unto all nations”, this is because the Gospel is a *testimony* of Christ and salvation by Him; it is a faithful declaration of

the will of God concerning His Son. In addition, the Gospel is a witness *against* those who reject it! It is thus a witness to those who believe, that they shall be saved; and to those who do not believe, that they shall be damned. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk. 16:16).

v.14: “*and then shall the end come.*”

The Lord Jesus Christ had been speaking of the end of the Jewish state and nation, and the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, we must not see this word, “end”, and assume it means the end of the world! The “end” of the Jewish state, and the temple, was just around the corner – just a few decades away. And in the verses to follow, the Lord speaks of that destruction itself.

The time of the end of the Jewish state, capital city, and temple, had come. For decades now the Jews had been rebelling against the Roman authorities. There were uprisings and tumults, which increased in frequency and violence. Eventually Cestius Gallus, the president of Syria, came into Judea with an army, spreading death and destruction as he went. In the city of Joppa alone, he slew 8400. In Galilee he slew 2000. He plundered and burnt the city of Zabulon, and burnt the city of Lydda. Arriving at Jerusalem itself, he entered it and burnt three divisions of the city. He then lifted the siege, and the Jews pursued his army and slew almost 6000 soldiers.

However, although Gallus had gone, many of the wealthier Jews of Jerusalem decided to quit the city for their own safety, and did so. And at the same time, remembering the words of their Lord in Matt. 24:16 (which will be examined in due course), many of the Jewish *Christians* also decided to vacate Jerusalem, and went to a place called Pella, in the mountains, and dwelt there for safety. But more about this a little further on.

How, then, did “the end come”?

The Emperor Nero, learning of Cestius Gallus’ defeat at the hands of the Jews, appointed Vespasian to go to Judea and stamp out the Jewish revolt. Vespasian’s son, Titus, was with him, and an army of 60 000 was assembled at Ptolemais. In AD 67 Vespasian marched against Judea. Cruel indeed were the Roman soldiers as they marched their way through Galilee and Judea, destroying towns and massacring

around 150 000 Jews, showing no mercy even to babies or the elderly.

In Caesaria, Vespasian prepared for the great assault on Jerusalem. But news reached him of the death of Nero, and, uncertain as to what the plans of the next emperor would be, he waited for further instructions before advancing on the city. This gave the Jews an almost two-year breathing space. But instead of repenting of their sins, they became even more rebellious than before. In Jerusalem itself there were two Jewish factions striving for superiority. A division of one faction was excluded from Jerusalem, but forced its way in during the night and wreaked such destruction that 8500 Jews, including women, babies and the elderly, were killed in that one night, their bodies lying in the streets. They then plundered the houses, took hold of the chief priests, Anaius and Jesus, and killed them. They massacred the commoners. They took the nobles who were not of their faction, scourged and then killed them, to the number of 12000. And if anyone wept over these murders, they were similarly slain. Anyone attempting to escape was killed. It was not long before dead bodies actually lay in heaps in the roads of the city.

Meanwhile, as Jew murdered Jew in the capital city, roving bands of criminals roamed the countryside of Judea, killing all who stood in their way and many who did not, including babes and women, and stole whatever they could. Then it came to pass that a massive group of such bandits under the leadership of one Simon son of Gioras, numbering, astoundingly, 40 000 men, got into Jerusalem and thereby formed yet a third warring faction of Jews. All three factions fought against one another with shocking cruelty, often inflamed by drunkenness. People were murdered as they brought sacrifices to the temple. Storehouses containing food were burnt by the rival factions. Heaps of dead bodies were everywhere, consisting of priests and people, citizens and foreigners. Blood was everywhere as well, including a veritable lake of blood in the courts of the temple itself.

God had given them up, and the Jewish nation had turned upon itself, destroying its own food supplies and its own people, weakening any possible opposition which might have been mounted against the Romans.

And the Romans were now coming! This news filled Jerusalem's inhabitants with great fear, for they knew there was nowhere to go. And yet still, Jew fought against Jew, Jew murdered Jew, and the streets

were filled with blood and bodies and weeping and wailing.

And so it came to pass that Titus, son of Vespasian, at the head of the Roman army, laid siege to Jerusalem.

The end had come.

But just as Jerusalem's destruction typified the destruction at the world's end, so the Gospel going into the known world of that time *prefigured* the Gospel being preached throughout the entire world before Christ returns to judge it. Before the end of the world occurs, the Gospel will have been preached to all nations of the world. Various Scriptures leave us in no doubt of this. For example, the Scriptures in which Christ gave what is called His Great Commission – to go into all nations, all the world, even unto the uttermost part of the earth, and preach the Gospel to every creature: Matt. 28:19,20; Mk. 16:15; Acts 1:8. The Saviour's Great Commission certainly looked way beyond merely the nations of the Roman Empire! His words were to be fulfilled throughout all the centuries that followed, from that time right up to the very end of the world. Christians are commissioned to *always* take His Gospel into *all* the earth.

It has happened in the centuries past, and it is happening to this day, as missionaries go into the far corners of the earth with the Gospel, to nations which have never heard it. And some from every nation under heaven will hear, and be saved! "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9,10).

Thus, although "the end" here refers to the end of the Jewish nation, yet *in type* it refers to the end of the world. For the end of the world will only come when this great Gospel work has been accomplished, and the very last elect soul is gathered in.



CHAPTER NINE

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

MATTHEW 24:15

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:)

v.15: *“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place”.*

The Lord had been speaking of the signs of His coming in judgment upon the Jewish nation. And now He speaks of the *instrument* which He would use to bring about this great destruction. It would be “the abomination of desolation” spoken of in the book of the prophet Daniel centuries before.

Again, Futurist interpreters apply this verse to the end of the world, as they do Daniel’s prophecy of the “abomination of desolation”. But in doing so they greatly err. This aspect of Daniel’s prophecy was fulfilled *in the first century AD*, and *only* in the first century AD. In AD 70 to be exact! There is no time, in our day or in the near future, when this verse, or the ones immediately following it, will be fulfilled, or even could be fulfilled. And this is an important reason for being able to state, with certainty, that Matthew 24 finds its primary and complete fulfilment in the first century AD. Every single verse of this prophecy was fulfilled then, which cannot be said of the end of the world. Although the events of that first century certainly prefigured much at the end of the world, this particular verse is *not* typical of anything yet to come. It was fulfilled at that time, and only at that time, as is true of the verses which immediately follow this one.

There are three places where Daniel prophesied of an abomination of desolation:

Dan. 11:31 speaks of the “abomination that maketh desolate”. This refers to a man named Antiochus Epiphanes, who in the year 167 BC invaded the land of the Jews, entered the temple in Jerusalem, and set up an idol of Jupiter at the very altar in the Holy of holies (the “holy place” of the temple, as Jesus called it). He then killed a pig, an abominable animal to the Jews, and sprinkled its blood on the altar, to defile it in their minds. He also renamed the temple, calling it the temple of Jupiter Olympias.

But this cannot be the prophecy Jesus was referring to, because Antiochus did this in the second century BC – long before Jesus was even born in the flesh. It was a fulfilled prophecy by the time He spoke these words. He was clearly prophesying of something still to come.

Then, Dan. 8:13 speaks of “the transgression of desolation”, which is the same as the “abomination that maketh desolate” in Dan. 11:31, for these verses describe the very same events. Therefore, Dan. 8:13 is not what Jesus was referring to, either.

But a similar thing occurred when the Romans entered Jerusalem, and the Jewish temple, in AD 70! Antiochus was in truth a forerunner of the Roman general, Titus. And Daniel prophesied of *this* “abomination of desolation” in Dan. 9:27: “And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.” This prophecy was fulfilled by the Roman army under Titus, when the temple was destroyed in AD 70. And we need to examine it, to understand what the Lord Jesus meant when He referred to it here. A fuller exposition is found in my book, *The Prophecies of Daniel*.³⁴

The Messiah “shall confirm the covenant with many for one week”. This meant for seven prophetic “days”, referring to seven actual *years*. It is referring to the New Covenant in the blood of Christ; for His blood was “shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:26-28). And He confirmed the covenant with many *Jews* at first: He established the covenant, to confirm what Jeremiah had prophesied in Jer. 31:31-33, that the Messiah would make a new covenant with Israel and Judah, putting His law in their inward parts and writing it on their hearts, and would be to them their God, and they would be

His people. And He confirmed it by the testimony of angels and men; by His doctrine; by His miracles; by His holy life; and by His death, resurrection, and ascension!

He confirmed it for “one week”: for seven years from the time He began His public ministry. His earthly ministry lasted for three and a half years, which is half a prophetic “week”. And the second three-and-a-half-year period during which He confirmed the covenant with the elect Jews immediately followed His ascension. From the day of Pentecost, for three and a half years, the Gospel went forth among the Jews, and thousands were converted, experiencing the blessings of the New Covenant in Christ’s blood! This period ended with the stoning of Stephen.

“And in the midst of the week” – that is, after His three and a half years of public ministry – “he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease”. For then He was crucified, becoming the antitype of all the types of the Jewish sacrificial system; and at that point, as far as God was concerned, all the Old Testament sacrifices ceased to have any validity. His Son had died, the final, complete and perfect sacrifice. No further typical animal sacrifices were needed.

Next, Dan. 9:27 says, “and for the overspreading of abominations he [the Messiah] shall make it desolate”. To the Jews, the Roman army was abominable; the soldiers were heathen idol-worshippers who defiled the temple of Jehovah with their own persons, and with the idolatrous ensigns. The “overspreading of abominations” refers to the Roman army overspreading their city, and then their temple. Indeed, the marginal note tells us that at this point, the Hebrew can be rendered, “with the abominable armies.”

And, *by* this very overspreading of abominations, the Messiah Himself made the temple, and the people, desolate! For He was judging the Jewish nation, and the Roman army was the instrument in His sovereign hands, accomplishing His purpose, although they did not know it. *Titus’ army* was the desolating abomination. Not only because they were uncircumcised, idolatrous heathens, and thus the fact that they stood in the temple, and even entered the Holy of holies, was an utter abomination to the Jews; but also because the images of their gods were depicted upon their ensigns.

And Titus, or rather one of his men, actually took this heathen insignia right into the Holy of holies – the most sacred place on earth for the Jews! Matt. 24:15 says, “stand in the holy place”; in the sister-passage in Mk. 13:14 it says, “standing where it ought not”. For this was the Holy of holies, into which only the high priest was allowed to enter once a year on the Day of Atonement. No heathen was ever permitted to set his foot there.

In the sister-passage to Matthew 24 in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus said: “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh” (Lk. 21:20). Jerusalem truly was encompassed by armies, in that dreadful year! This had also been prophesied of by Isaiah centuries before, when the Lord through him told Jerusalem: “And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee” (Isa. 29:3). For in sending the Roman army to encompass Jerusalem, the Lord Himself may be said to encompass it. And Jesus told His disciples that when they saw this happening, they would know that very soon it would all be over: Jerusalem would be made desolate, and the temple – once the house of the Lord – would be desolate as well. Remember that just before His discourse in Matthew 24, Jesus had spoken these words in Matt. 23:38: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”

The verse then says that this would be “even until the consummation”: the consummation of God’s wrath upon that people; the utter destruction of the city and the temple; “and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate”: the Jews are meant by “the desolate”, and all this was predetermined by God for their sins.

In the prophecies of Daniel, then, there are in fact *two* “abominations of desolation”; but only the one in Dan. 9:27 refers to the Roman army. The other (in Dan. 8 and Dan.11) was about Antiochus, at an earlier time in history.

And in referring His disciples to the prophecy of Daniel 9, Christ was also referring them to that place in their Old Testament Scriptures which would show them the *time* when this prophecy would be fulfilled – which was *soon after* Messiah was cut off; as well as the *reason* for the things which would happen to the nation – this being their great sin of rejecting Him.

v.15: “(whoso readeth, let him understand:)”.

These are not the words of Matthew, as an addition of his at this point to what the Lord was saying, but are the words of Jesus Himself. His meaning is that the reader of Daniel’s prophecy needs to understand that *this* is the time being referred to in Dan.9:27 – this time in AD 70 when the Romans would enter Jerusalem and the temple, and destroy both. When we read the Scriptures, we must seek to understand them, otherwise our reading is in vain (Jn. 5:39; Acts 8:30; Dan. 9:25).

In this verse, Jesus said that “ye” – i.e. the generation then living – would “see” the Romans doing these things; and in the next verses He told them what to do when they saw these things. And what was it they were to do? In a word – flee!

Let us then study these verses.



CHAPTER TEN

FLEEING

MATTHEW 24:16-20

16. Then let them which be in Judaea 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:

v.16: *“Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains”.*

We have seen many reasons for placing the fulfilment of this prophecy in the first century AD; and v.15 is one of the strongest reasons of all. It could only have been fulfilled in the events of that time. And this being so, the verses that follow it (verses 15 to 20) *also* had their fulfilment then. They are not about the period just before the world’s end, as Futurists fondly imagine, believing them to be about the “tribulation” for seven years at the end of the world (according to their theory). They have nothing to do with any such imaginary period. Context is all-important – and the entire context shows that they had to have been fulfilled in the first century AD, when the Romans besieged Jerusalem.

And here in v.16 the Lord Jesus commanded the Jewish Christians to flee to the mountains for refuge, as Lot was commanded to do when he fled Sodom (Gen. 19:15-17), when they saw these things happening to their capital city, and to the temple. This was the signal for them to

flee into the mountains. He warned them beforehand of what would happen (v.25), and He commanded them to flee for their own safety! They were to observe the signs of the times, remember His words, and preserve their lives by fleeing to the mountains, away from Jerusalem.

There are two lessons which believers, living in other times than those Jewish believers of the first century AD, are to learn from this. The first is that in times of great danger, if the Lord opens a way of escape, believers are to take it. "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matt. 10:23). And the second is that this is one of the great reasons why prophecy is given: so that Christians may discern the signs of the times, and act as the Lord leads. Bible prophecy is not simply theoretical, of no earthly value to the believer. It is intensely practical in its effects upon us. We are to *know* what prophecy says, so that we may *act* as the Lord would have us act. Of the children of Isacchar it is written that they "were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32). And Christians are to understand the times by studying Bible prophecy, to know what the Church of God, the "Israel of God" of the New Testament (Gal. 6:16), ought to do.

Now Jesus said that when the Christians in the city of Jerusalem, as well as anywhere else in Judea, saw these things happening, they were to flee to the mountains and hide there (if they had not as yet done so). In the sister-passages in Luke's Gospel, the words are as follows: "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which 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" (Lk. 21:20,21).

And indeed, history records a most remarkable fulfilment of this prophecy. As we have seen, Cestius Gallus had advanced with his troops to Jerusalem, and besieged it; but then, just when the city might have been easily taken, he suddenly raised the siege and withdrew his army. And *at this point* the Christians in Jerusalem, in obedience to Christ's command, fled out of the city. They discerned the signs of the times, they remembered the Lord's prophecy, and they made use of the providential opportunity which had presented itself, and fled! In obedience to the command of their Lord, they fled "to the mountains". Many fled to a place called Pella (today it is called Petra), which was

the ancient capital of Edom. It was on the other side of the Jordan River, in a remote area, protected by rocks, caves, and underground passages. The only entrance was a long, narrow ravine through which a river flowed. Other Christians fled to other places of refuge, including a mountain called Mt. Libanus.

Then later, when the Roman army under Titus again besieged the city, the Jews rushed out and fell upon the army's tenth legion. As a result hostilities were suspended for a while; and the opening of the city gates to let the Jews rush out and fall upon the Romans also gave those who wanted to escape, even at this late hour, an opportunity to do so. It is entirely possible that any remaining Jewish *Christians* were now able to flee, in obedience to their Lord's command.

They obeyed these prophetic words of their Lord, because they saw that what was happening *was the fulfilment of this prophecy*; and because they heeded their Lord and fled, they did not suffer or die during the terrible siege of the city which followed, under Titus. There was not a Christian left in the city! The Lord had protected His people, forewarning them through this prophecy. Again we see that prophecy is not merely for intellectual stimulation, but serves a very practical purpose. It is for the good of the Lord's people. We are to pay very careful heed to the words of the Lord. *All Scripture is for our profit* (2 Tim. 3:16).

In Daniel's great prophecy this same dreadful event, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, is prophesied of in Dan. 12:1, which says: "and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." They were delivered because they fled, in obedience to their Lord.

As Prov. 22:3 says, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished."

Another very significant point to note: Titus surrounded Jerusalem, beginning the siege on the day of the Passover feast – the very period of time in which, some four decades before, the Jews had instigated the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, their Messiah! Truly, God is not mocked. They had brought about the violent death of the Messiah sent to them by God at the time of the Passover, and now God was bringing about their own violent destruction, beginning at the very same time of the Passover.

And as it was the Passover, large numbers of Jews were present in Jerusalem, who had come from all over to keep the feast. Yet the Lord Jesus had warned His own disciples, “Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it [Jerusalem] depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto” (Lk. 21:21). The Jewish Christians had obeyed, and were spared; but the unconverted Jews who were in the city did not leave for the most part, and the unconverted Jews from throughout the land, and even from other lands, had come *into* the city – and they perished in the terrible destruction.

There was, therefore, this perfect fulfilment of the prophecy. But even though it was fulfilled historically, this does not mean that believers in all ages cannot find great value in the contemplation of these words of the Lord as well. For there is a principle here, which is of immense value to Christians, everywhere and at any time. It has been touched on above, but it bears repeating now: in times of imminent danger, it is lawful for Christians, and in fact very often their duty, to flee, if God in His providence provides a means of escape. The very same principle is taught in Matt. 10:23: “But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another”. It is not cowardice to flee, when to stay would be to no advantage, and would even be to the loss of one’s life. He who flees may live to fight again another day!

When it becomes evident, to a Christian, that by staying in a certain place he would not be useful, and by fleeing he would save and prolong his life, then (as a general rule, all other things considered) he may flee.

Certainly there are exceptions to this rule. For example, if a man is called to be a missionary in a particular place, then to that place he must go, even if his life is in danger in doing so; for if he is in the will of the Lord, then that is the best, indeed the only, place to be. Many faithful missionaries have deliberately gone into extremely dangerous places – or stayed in them when others were fleeing – because they knew this was the will of the Lord for them.

There was a time when Paul fled a place of persecution (Acts 9:23-25). Clearly, he felt no calling of the Lord to stay there, where certain death awaited him. But on another occasion he knew that the Lord wanted him to go to Jerusalem; he was “bound in the spirit”, he could not do otherwise; he had to be obedient to his Lord (Acts 20:22-24).

He knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him when he got there – but still he went, because he knew it was the Lord’s will for him (Acts 21:10-14). Thus we find that although Paul was quite willing to flee, at times, he did not do so when he knew that it was not the Lord’s will for him.

These things teach us that as a general rule, believers may flee (if they are able, in God’s providence) during times of persecution or danger; but the exception would be when they know it is not the Lord’s will for them.

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

The parallel passages are in Lk. 17:31 and Mk. 13:15.

Jewish houses had flat roofs. In the hot weather, people would go up onto their housetops to sit and relax, especially in the cool of the day; to pray; or to entertain guests (2 Sam. 11:2; Matt. 10:27; Acts 10:9).

And this fact is yet further evidence, from the context, that the Lord Jesus was speaking about *those* times, and *that* land! This is *not* to be fulfilled at some future date, near His second coming. In most of the world, housetops are not flat. Clearly, the reference is to that specific time and place.

The point of the Lord’s words was to urge the Christians to make great haste! They were to lose no time, they were not to dilly-dally, nor even to gather together some food or possessions. They were to simply leave, and leave quickly. For when life is in danger, there is no time to gather up possessions! In fact it would be folly. Christians have treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21), a heavenly home, and all necessary things will be added unto them if they but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

When the Christians in Jerusalem, and in Judea in general, saw all these things happening, they were to make haste, come down off their housetops and not stop to gather up possessions, but flee as quickly as possible to the mountains. “In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it” (Lk. 17:31-33).

v.18: *“Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.”*

Men out in the fields, ploughing or planting, etc., often worked stripped to the waist; but when they had to flee, Jesus said they were not to first go home and collect their clothes, but to make great haste and escape for their lives, just wearing what they had on, or snatching up no more than the clothes they had taken off and left in the fields while they worked.

v.19: *“And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!”*

The siege of Jerusalem, and the war, would be a terrible time for pregnant Jewish women, and for Jewish mothers with small children, for famine would break out in the city once the Roman army besieged it. And the famine would be so severe that their little ones would suffer greatly. It would be as described in Lam.4:3,4: “Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them.” The famine became so severe that people were snatching food out of one another’s hands, and eating it uncooked. Women grabbed food from their husbands, children snatched it from their parents, mothers took food away from their own infants – and even nursing mothers refused to give milk to their infants and took it themselves!

In addition, children would be killed brutally, even while in their wombs! This had happened before in their history (Hos. 9:13; 13:16; Amos 1:13), and it happened again when the nation suffered this immense destruction at the hands of the Romans. Also, if mothers fled at this time, this too would be terrible, for fleeing with young ones is extremely difficult.

Doubtless there were many Christian women who were pregnant at that time; but their pregnancies would make things very difficult for them as they fled (in obedience to v.16), as they could not move fast. And the same was true of Christian women with infants, or very young children: carrying them would make their flight vastly more difficult.

There was another occasion when the Lord Jesus spoke of the coming

destruction of Jerusalem, and mentioned how terrible it would be for mothers with young children. As He was being led away to be crucified, Lk. 23:27-29 says: “And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.”

“The days are coming”! The days of Jerusalem’s destruction, of the massacre of vast numbers of Jews, and of the rest being led away captive into all nations. They were not far away! Indeed, they were only some four decades into the future when He spoke these words. And it would be such a terrible time that people would consider those who had never had children as being blessed indeed, for at least they did not have to see their children torn out of their arms, murdered, or starving to death! And those who did not have babies in their wombs were not ripped up! It was a day of vengeance such as the world had never seen.

v.20: “*But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter*”.

Why not? Why were the Christians living in Judea at that time to pray that they would not have to flee from the city, and from Judea, in the winter?

It was for the obvious reason that winter, being cold, was a very difficult time in which to travel, or to flee from one place to another. In today’s world, most people do not experience anywhere near as much discomfort during winter as people in earlier times did. Travel was extremely difficult, and fleeing even more so. This is why Paul wrote to Timothy, “Do thy diligence to come before winter” (2 Tim. 4:21).

Not only that, but winter was a very uncomfortable time to live in mountains, or in other remote refuges. And thus the Lord Jesus directed His saints, who would be alive in Judea at that time and would have to flee, to pray to God, who controls all events, all times and seasons, that if it was consistent with His will these things would not occur during the depth of winter.

Interestingly, centuries before at the time of the destruction of the *first* temple, it was summer, which the Jews viewed as a great favour of God to them, precisely because winter was so difficult. And this would

have been an encouragement to the Jewish Christians of AD 70, to pray to the Lord for the same favour again, at the time of the destruction of *this* temple.

In God's providence, the siege of AD 70 began in the spring of the year.

v.20: "*neither on the sabbath day*".

Here is yet another evidence that the Lord Jesus was not prophesying about persecution just prior to His second coming. For why would it matter at all, *now*, if one's flight was on the Sabbath day?

The Christian Church does not keep the Jewish Sabbath. And although many Christians observe the first day of the week as a "Christian Sabbath", Jesus was not referring to Sunday here. He was speaking as a Jew, to Jews; and the only Sabbath they knew, and indeed the only Sabbath the Lord ever gave to anyone, was the seventh-day Sabbath, which was in force from the time of Moses to the time of the New Covenant.³⁵

This verse, then, is not about the time just before the end of the world, as Futurists imagine. Today there would simply be no need for Christians around the world to pray that their flight would not be on the Sabbath day. It would not matter! But in those days, for Jewish Christians, it mattered very much. For although the Jewish Christians were not under obligation to observe the Sabbath – it was a ceremonial law that had now been abrogated by the Lord (Col. 2:16,17) – *unregenerate* Jews certainly *did* observe it; and to travel on that day would have been extremely difficult for Jewish Christians living in Judea, because the Jewish leaders would have watched to make sure the Jews did not "violate the Sabbath", and only permitted them to travel what was called "a Sabbath day's journey" (about 2000 cubits), which was not enough to escape the danger. Therefore, even though Jewish Christians were free, in the Lord's sight, to travel on the seventh day just as on any other, yet in practice they could not do so. And although some Jewish scholars permitted one to break the Sabbath when one's life was in danger, or to defend oneself, yet they were not all in agreement on this, and in fact by this time (and for some time already) they had been debating it.

In addition, although Jewish Christians were not bound to observe the Jewish Sabbath, as it was part of the Old Testament ceremonial law

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and was therefore now abolished (Col. 2:13-17), the fact is that at this time many of them still did (see Acts 21:20). They were still zealous for the ceremonial law of Moses, not yet having properly understood that they were no longer under it. And therefore the Lord Jesus said what He did about praying that they would not have to flee on the Sabbath – not because it was unlawful in the sight of God to travel on that day, for it was not, but because He knew how difficult it would be for them to do so.

Now although this verse was fulfilled in the first century AD, and although it does not even typify events at the end of the world, yet we are still to learn from it. It teaches us the vital importance of *prayer*, in times of calamity. We are to pray to the Lord for help; for protection; for an easing of our circumstances. We are to walk by faith in Him.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

GREAT TRIBULATION

MATTHEW 24:21,22

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.

v.21: *“For then shall be great tribulation”.*

Again, Futurists apply these words of the Lord to some supposed “seven-year tribulation” which they believe will occur at the end of the world. But this is erroneous.

“For then”: that is, *at the time of* the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. *This* is what Jesus was speaking about. He had just told them to pray that their flight would not be in the winter, nor on the Sabbath day; and then He goes on to say, “For *then* [at that time] shall be great tribulation”!

He was referring to the very same time which Daniel had prophesied of, in Dan. 12:1: “and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.” This was a prophecy of the great tribulation which the *Jewish nation* suffered, in that fateful year of AD 70 (as shown in my book, *The Prophecies of Daniel* ³⁶). For in the very next words of v.21 we find the Lord Jesus using almost identical language in describing this time – and we know He was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans:

v.21: *“such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”*

Almost identical language to that of Dan. 12:1. And words cannot

adequately describe the horror of that time, when God's wrath was poured out upon the Jewish nation for their sins. Let us study what history tells us of that terrible tribulation:

As the siege began, the Jews in the city continued to fight among themselves. There had been three factions, led by John, Simon and Eleazar, but now there were only the two under John and Simon, as the men of Eleazar's faction had joined themselves to one or other of these two. The middle section of the city was burnt, and the fire and the plunder was terrible indeed. Then the Romans managed to take control of two of the three walls around the city.

And then famine broke out.

As this dreadful famine spread, the scenes which presented themselves were horrible beyond the power of words to fully describe. As mentioned previously, people snatched the food from one another. Nor were family ties any protection: children took from parents, parents from children, husbands from wives and wives from husbands. People were tortured in an attempt to find any food they might be hiding.

This famine drove large numbers of Jews to desert the city, rushing straight into the arms of the Roman legions, who lost no time in crucifying them in such huge numbers that they struggled to find space for the crosses to be erected after a time, and it was difficult even to find sufficient wood to make enough crosses to crucify all the Jews who had been captured!

When it was learned that some of the fleeing Jews had swallowed gold to try to smuggle it out, the Arabs and Syrians in the Roman army ripped open 2000 Jews in a single night.

After a time, even Titus could almost bear it no longer, and he personally implored the Jews to surrender rather than to continue suffering so greatly; but they refused, even reviling him. He therefore had the trench dug (see the exposition above of Matt. 24:2, with Lk. 19:43), which was 39 furlongs in circuit and which the soldiers dug in just three days.

Now, with absolutely no food getting into the city, the famine worsened – and worsened even more. So many starved to death that housetops were covered in bodies, as were all parts of the city. People literally dropped like flies, even once-healthy young men. There was simply no way for so many dead to be buried. Indeed, those burying

them often died as they did so. So great was the suffering that, instead of cries and wailings, an awful silence hung over the city like a shroud. Meanwhile, robbers stole from tombs and from dead bodies, laughing maniacally as they did so.

Simon, son of Gioras, that evil bandit leader, murdered the high priest, Matthias, and his three sons, claiming they were on the side of the Romans. He deliberately executed Matthias last, so that he would have to watch his sons being put to death.

A Jew named Mannaeus, who had been given the job of registering the dead bodies, escaped the city, went to Titus, and told him that from the time the siege began in the fourth month, until the beginning of the seventh month following, 115 880 dead bodies had been carried through just a single gate of the city. Not long afterwards a number of other Jews deserted, and told the Romans that the whole number of the dead, of the poor of the city who had been cast out at its various gates, amounted to at least 600 000. Even for many of those battle-hardened soldiers, this news was distressing to them; and Titus himself, overwhelmed by what he could see of the vast number of corpses, actually raised his hands towards heaven and, appealing to God, solemnly declared that he was not responsible for these things. The Jews had brought it upon themselves, by their rebellion against the Romans and their stubborn refusal to surrender. But of course, Titus was by no means innocent.

Josephus himself, who was with the Romans as they besieged the city, on Titus' behalf called upon John and his followers to surrender and thereby save themselves; but John refused, and stated that Jerusalem, being the city of the Lord, could never be captured. It was prophesied of old regarding Jerusalem, "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: *yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us*" (Mic. 3:11). This is what these wicked men believed, even as they stood in the midst of tens of thousands of dead bodies, a lake of blood in the temple, famine and pestilence stalking the city, and the most powerful army in the world encamped entirely around it. It is then no wonder that the prophet went on to say: "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest" (v.12). Partially fulfilled when the Chaldeans

invaded the land, it was perfectly fulfilled when the Romans did so in the first century AD.

As the famine worsened, the Jews, having nothing else with which to fill their empty bellies, started to eat their leather sandals and belts, the skins of their shields, dry grass, and the dung of oxen. And then – *cannibalism*. Many committed this horrible deed, but one example, in particular, stands out of the pages of history. A Jewish noblewoman killed her infant, then cooked and ate half of the body. When the Jewish soldiers discovered her, being attracted by the smell of cooked flesh, and thinking she had hidden *legitimate* food somewhere, they demanded that she produce it; and when they saw what it was, they were horrified. *This* is what even the mothers of Israel had now been reduced to! Thus was the prophecy of Moses, so many centuries before, *literally fulfilled*, when by divine inspiration he had foretold what would come to pass if Israel disobeyed the Lord: “The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth [and the *eagle* was the well-known ensign of the Roman legions]... and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates” (Deut. 28:49,52); and note these words, a clear prophecy of that very Jewish noblewoman, and others like her: “The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness [plainly not a servant girl, a peasant woman, but a noblewoman], her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, *and toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet*, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates” (vv. 56-57).

In addition, how those prophetic words of the Lord Jesus were now fulfilled, when, as He was stumbling along the road to His own crucifixion, with women bewailing and lamenting Him, He turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

(Lk. 23:28-31). This was now the time of the dry tree indeed. This was the time of horrors, of sufferings unimaginable to those women a mere forty years before!

Finally the Romans were able to destroy a part of the inner wall, and advanced on the temple itself. It was in Titus' mind to preserve this beautiful edifice as a monument; but this was not what the sovereign Lord had ordained, and no purpose of mere man could alter the divine decree. And so it came to pass that a Roman soldier, claiming that he acted under a divine impulse, and not heeding what his general had commanded, threw a flaming brand through a window of the temple and set it alight. The Jews were terrified that their beautiful temple would be destroyed, so they rushed into it to put the fire out; and Titus himself, hoping to save it, rushed to the spot in his chariot, ordering his soldiers to extinguish the fire. But it was all in vain. There was such chaos everywhere, and such noise, that many of his men would not even have heard him shouting his orders; but there were others who heard him clearly enough, yet pretended not to, and deliberately helped the fire to spread still further. Their anger and hatred towards the Jews was by this time so great, and they were by now so maddened by rage, bloodlust and the desire for plunder, that they were unstoppable. They ran the Jews through with their swords; they crushed them under their feet. The soldiers showed no mercy to women or children, to the aged or the infirm, to priests or commoners, to those who resisted or those who surrendered. The bodies of dead and dying Jews were literally heaped up around the altar, where they had fled in the vain hope that once there, they would be protected by God. The steps from the altar to the outer court flowed with their blood. The entire scene was one of such horror, that no human words could ever fully describe it. It has no parallel in all of world history.

Titus continued, in vain, to try to save the temple, but eventually he had no choice but to leave the scene, and it continued to burn. This vast, magnificent building, so beautiful that words could hardly be found to adequately describe its glory, was all ablaze, from one end to the other. The cries and screams of Roman soldiers, Jewish rebels, and the dying added to the dreadful roaring sound of the flames as the entire immense edifice was engulfed.

When, at last, the edifice was reduced to ruins, the Roman soldiers

joyously raised their ensigns on a part of the eastern gate which was left, then offered sacrifices to their gods.

“Thus terminated the glory and existence of this sacred and venerable Edifice [the temple], which from its stupendous size, its massy solidity, and astonishing strength, seemed formed to resist the most violent operations of human force, and to stand, like the pyramids, amid the shocks of successive ages, until the final dissolution of the globe.”³⁷ But it was not to be. The Lord had spoken in judgment against it.

For five days after the temple was destroyed, those priests who had managed to escape the destruction and the killing sat on top of one of its now-broken walls. Then they came to Titus and begged his pardon. But he refused to grant it to them, saying that as the temple was now destroyed, for the sake of which he would have spared their lives, it was right that now its priests should be destroyed as well; and on his orders they were put to death.

As for the leaders of the Jewish factions which had fought so violently within the city itself, Titus said he would spare their lives if they laid down their arms. But even now they still obstinately refused. Titus was now enraged and utterly frustrated, and officially issued a proclamation that from now on he would grant no pardon – thereby giving to his soldiers permission to do as they pleased. And so it came to pass that the soldiers burnt still more great buildings, and then fanned out through the city, killing any they found still alive, until even they grew weary of the endless slaughter, and now gathered together the families of the Jews who remained, and began to sell them into slavery. But there were too many families on sale, and not enough men to purchase them. And thus was fulfilled yet another aspect of that ancient prophecy given through Moses: “there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you” (Deut. 28:68).

Yet even now it was not over. The Romans controlled the lower city of Jerusalem, and set it on fire; but the Jews who remained fled to the higher city, where they continued to hurl insults at the Romans. But the soldiers then assaulted the walls of the higher city and destroyed them, filling the Jews there with renewed fear and trembling. Many of them now fled for refuge to caverns and underground passages, where the Romans later found at least 2000 bodies. We are again reminded of

the words of Jesus' prophecy to the women who followed Him to His crucifixion: "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us" (Lk. 23:30).

Now that the soldiers controlled all the city walls, their colours were raised on the towers, and they shouted for joy. And then they plundered the Jews' houses, after which they set them alight; and they fanned out through the city streets, mercilessly slaughtering all Jews they found still alive, until the dead bodies filled the streets and their blood flowed like streams.

Although Titus ordered that only resisting Jews should now be killed, his soldiers showed no mercy even to those who did not resist, including the sick and the old. He also gave commandment that the entire city should be razed to the very foundations; and his soldiers accordingly threw down the buildings and dug up the foundations, so thoroughly that it would be difficult for anyone passing by to believe that people had once lived there! All this we saw, in considering Matt. 24:2 and Lk. 19:44 above.

It was over at last. The vengeance of the Lord, the fulfilment of His prophecies – all was accomplished now. Jerusalem lay in ruins. Once "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth" (Psa. 48:2), it had now "become heaps" (Mic. 3:12). Prophets had foretold of this day for centuries; the Son of God Himself had foretold of it just four decades before, weeping over the city; to this wonderful capital the Lord had sent His servants, time and time again, and then had sent His Son; but as they had rejected the prophets, so they rejected the Son, and had Him crucified by the very nation which had now reduced their own nation, its capital and its glorious temple, to ruins.

That it was God's own doing, even the heathen general, Titus, was forced to admit, as he surveyed Jerusalem and its great towers; for he exclaimed, "Had not God Himself aided our operations, and driven the Jews from their fortresses, it would have been absolutely impossible to have taken them; for what could men, and the force of engines, have done against such towers as these?"

Over one million Jews died in that siege, and in the Roman attack which followed it. Josephus calculated the dead, by various means and in different parts of the land of Judea, as above two million, from famine, plague and sword. Vast numbers were tortured and crucified.

Some 97000 were taken captive.³⁸ Many were sent in chains to arenas throughout the empire to fight as gladiators; others were sent in chains to Egypt to labour as slaves there; others were sold as slaves. Again, Moses prophesied, so many centuries before, that this would happen to the Jews for their sins: “The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young: and he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee...” (Deut. 28:49-57).

The words of the verse we are presently studying are: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time”. We have seen the truth of it. What the Jewish nation suffered at this time was greater than all its sufferings at any time in its history: worse than what it endured in Egypt, or in Babylon, or during the time of the Maccabees. Furthermore, it was worse than *any* nation had ever suffered since the beginning of the world; including the terrible destructions of Troy, Babylon, Carthage, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc., etc. Josephus correctly stated: “the multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world”.³⁹

And it was all for their terrible sins against the Lord their God, and against His Son, their Messiah, whom they rejected and murdered. It was divine vengeance upon them, and never has a nation suffered such things at any one time as they did. For the sin which they committed was never before committed (the rejection of their Messiah), nor by its very nature could it ever be committed like that again. And thus as their sin was the greatest of all, so their punishment was as well.

But here is something very significant: Jesus said, “*no, nor ever*

shall be.” Meaning, not till the world ends will there ever be such a destruction of a nation again. And at this point a question may arise: what about the Jewish Holocaust of World War Two? Six million died in that holocaust, it is true. But this verse proves that the Jews today are *not* (for the most part) the direct descendants of the Jews of biblical times! Yes, they follow the religion of Judaism, and call themselves Jews; but Judaism is not the religion of the Jews in the Old Testament, and the fact is that the vast majority of Jews, today, are descendants of various *Gentile* peoples who converted to Judaism, some even centuries ago. The majority are not the lineal descendants of the Jews of biblical times.⁴⁰ There is much historical evidence for this, as well as the words of the Lord in this verse. The truth is, the Jews who suffered so greatly in World War Two were in fact mostly of Gentile descent, although identifying themselves as Jews and following Judaism. The Jewish Holocaust certainly was a monstrous destruction of people – but it was the destruction of millions of people descended from various nations, who identified themselves as Jews. And thus what occurred in that terrible conflict was not a denial of these words of the Lord Jesus.

The “tribulation” mentioned in this verse, therefore, was a tribulation experienced by the *Jews*, not the Christians.

That being said, however, it is also true to say that ever since the Christian Church came into existence, it *has* suffered “great tribulation”, and will continue to experience this throughout its existence – as various *other* Scriptures make clear: for example, Rev. 1:9; 7:9-14; Acts 14:22; 7:59-8:3; etc.

v.22: “*And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved*”.

The “shortening” of those days does not mean the daylight hours of each of those days, or the length of each one of them, were shortened, for this did not happen. The meaning is that God “shortened” the *number* of the days of tribulation, which began with the siege of Jerusalem; for if He had not done so – if the siege had gone on any longer, if it had been dragged out to even more days than it already had been – *all* the Jews in the city would have died. They would have died by famine, or pestilence, or sword; or even by the vicious fighting that went on among themselves. And not only in the city itself, but throughout the

land of Judea; for the same calamities were occurring there. There would not have been a Jew alive if it had gone on much longer. But God shortened the days of the siege. They were not shortened to less than what the sovereign God had predetermined, of course; but they were shortened to less than what their sins deserved.

v.22: *“but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”*

For the sake of God’s elect (the Jewish elect, in this context, chosen in Christ before the world began). But did not the Jewish Christians flee from Jerusalem? Yes, they did; but if He had not shortened those days, even those Jewish Christians, who were in hiding in the mountains, etc., would have been killed. And also, those elect ones who would yet be born, in future times, of Jewish parents who were still in the city and the country (or perhaps who had been born but were still infants). And so was fulfilled the words of Daniel the prophet, concerning the very same terrible time: “and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Dan. 12:1).

These words of Jesus’ prophecy reveal the Lord’s great love and care for His chosen people at all times – even in the very worst of times. Truly, instead of complaining when our sufferings are long, we should be thankful that they are not longer!



CHAPTER TWELVE

FALSE CHRISTS AND FALSE PROPHETS

MATTHEW 24:23-25

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.

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

The word, “Then”, ties this verse directly to what the Lord Jesus had just been prophesying about. “Then” – when? When the events of the preceding verses occurred! For this part of the prophecy was fulfilled in the years prior to the siege of Jerusalem (as was seen from v.5); it was also fulfilled during the siege itself; and then afterwards as well, once the Romans left and took many Jews captive, leaving only a few scattered throughout the country. Some Jews then claimed that their Messiah had come, and even that they knew where He was!

During the siege itself, certain men arose, claiming to *be* the Christ; their disciples would then say that Christ was here, or he was there; and these false Christs, by their lying messages, caused the people to stay where they were, and neither to flee the city nor to surrender. In this way they caused even more Jews to suffer and die – people who could have escaped and saved their lives, if they had not listened to false Christs and their disciples!

But the Jewish Christians remembered the words of their Lord – the warning He gave here in v.23, as well as in v.5 – and they did not believe the claims of these false Messiahs. Instead, they fled the city,

thereby saving their lives.

And after the terrible destruction was over, there were others who arose, who claimed to be Christ as well. Soon afterwards, for example, a man called Jonathan led many disciples off into the desert of Cyrene, and said that he would show great signs and wonders; but he was defeated by Catullius, the Roman governor. Then, during the time of Adrian, Bar-Cochab arose, claiming to be the Christ, being encouraged by a rabbi, and many of the Jews. His name means son of a star, in reference to Num. 24:17, which is a prophecy about the true Christ, the Lord Jesus. The Jews actually crowned this man; but the Romans defeated him after a siege, and he and many Jews perished.

The words in the sister-passage in Mk. 13:21 are virtually identical with these words in Matthew; and in the sister-passage in Luke, it says: “And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk. 17:20,21). People cannot point to a particular place and say of the kingdom of God, or of Christ, “Lo, here! or, Lo there!” If anyone says such a thing, it is not to be believed. Christ is in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father; therefore, if anyone says He is here or there on earth, we know it is a lie.

The very next words in Luke 17 say: “And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them” (Lk. 17:22,23). The disciples would have loved to have seen Jesus in the flesh, and on earth again, after He had returned to heaven! But it was not to be. And when men said, “See here; or, see there” (meaning, as in Matthew, “Lo, here is Christ, or there”), true believers did not go after them.

Matt. 24:23, then, and its sister-passages in Mk. 13:21 and Lk. 17:20-23, were fulfilled in the first century AD. But even so, these words of the Lord certainly have great application, also, to Christians of *all* periods in the Christian Church: for *many* false Christs have arisen through the centuries, as in v.5!

Within Roman Catholicism in particular, there is the greatest false

Christ, the pope of Rome, sitting on his throne, exalting himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God (2 Thess. 2:3,4). And men have certainly pointed to him and said, in effect, “Lo, here is Christ!” But we are never to believe them! He is a deceiver – an impostor – the very Antichrist of which we are warned in the Word of God.

And then there are the multitudes of Roman Catholic priests as well. Each one is explicitly said to be “another Christ”, in the teaching of Roman Catholicism.⁴¹ They claim the very powers of Christ Himself! And men will point to them and say, in effect, “Lo, here is Christ, or there!” But we are not to believe them! They are deceivers and impostors.

And then there is the false Christ of the Roman Catholic mass. Think about this carefully – for this verse certainly condemns *that* false “Christ” as well. Within Romanism, the mass is the central blasphemy. According to Romish teaching, the priest is able to change the bread and wine into the actual body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ, and then to offer Him on the altar.⁴² And this consecrated “host” (as it is called) – this wafer-god of Rome – is as it were pointed to by the faithful, and by their priests, and they say, in effect, “Here is Christ, or there is Christ!” They believe that the piece of bread is Christ Himself.

In addition, other false Christs have appeared through the years, and do so even today, within all kinds of cults and false religions. But we are not to believe them either.

Thus there is definitely a wider application of this verse to all ages of the Christian Church. Christians must never be misled by these false Christs – whoever they may be! They must not believe them, go after them, nor follow them.

v.24: *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets”.*

The false Christs claimed to be the Messiah himself, and the false prophets delivered lying and false prophecies. But there were also – as may be seen from v.23 – false prophets *of* the false Christs. These were men who did all they could to persuade the people to believe in the false Christs. They were the ones who said to the people, “Lo, here is Christ, or there”!

As mentioned previously, one of the false Christs who arose at that time was named Bar-Cochab. And a man named Akiba was his false prophet, who proclaimed that Bar-Cochab was the Messiah. Some of the false Christs, then, had false prophets of their own.

v.24: “*and shall shew great signs and wonders*”.

Jonathan, for example, claimed to perform signs and wonders, as did Bar-Cochab – he made it look as if flame came out of his mouth, for example. But these supposed “great signs and wonders” were all cons, tricks, deceptions. Nevertheless many believed them. Even though they were not real, they *appeared* to be real to the gullible.

v.24: “*insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*”

It is impossible for the elect of God to be *totally and finally* deceived. God does not permit it to happen to them! He upholds them by His power; and it is for this reason alone that none of them can be finally or totally deceived, and thus lost.

In the sister-passage in Mk.13:22, the words are, “to *seduce*, if it were possible, the very elect.” Deception comes by seduction! To “seduce” means to lead aside, or to lead away; to persuade one to desert his allegiance or service (in this case, to persuade a professing Christian to desert the Lord, and the service of the Lord); to lead a person astray in conduct or belief; to tempt, entice, or beguile to do something wrong. At the beginning of the world the devil seduced Eve, in that she was led astray, persuaded to desert the Lord, tempted to do wrong. And the devil has continued to seek to do the very same thing to the elect of God ever since then. He seeks to seduce them from their Lord and Master. He seeks to deceive them.

Any true Christian may certainly be deceived *for a time*, by false doctrine or by a false teacher, otherwise there would be no need for warnings such as these: “Take heed that no man deceive you” (Matt. 24:4), and, “Let no man deceive you by any means” (2 Thess. 2:3). It is certainly possible for true Christians to be deceived, and it does happen. But such deception is only temporary, as far as the believer is concerned. It is never total, and it is never permanent. The Holy Spirit, who dwells in each Christian’s heart, does not permit that. For if it were possible, it would mean that the devil would have ultimate

victory over a child of God, and that a child of God could lose his salvation. But this is utterly impossible.

In fact, the utter impossibility of this ever happening is taught right here in these words of the Lord Jesus! They not only speak of the great attempts made to deceive the elect, by the enemy of souls and by the enemies of truth; but they also reveal the impossibility of the elect ever being finally or totally deceived. For the Lord says, “*if* it were possible” – proving that it is not!

It is impossible for those who were chosen in eternity, by God, to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ, to ever be so deceived as to lose their salvation and go to hell. The Arminian imagines it is possible. He says a child of God today may become a child of Satan tomorrow, if he is not careful; but this is a lie. The beautiful doctrine of the perseverance of the saints shows us that this is impossible. Electing grace *cannot* be overcome, and the saints *will* finally persevere to the end. This is the clear teaching of such lovely passages as Rom. 8:30 and Jn. 10:28.

Certainly, those false Christs and false prophets were at times very persuasive. Their great signs and wonders looked very real, and they seemed to have real power. Theirs was not merely a feeble deception, but a very powerful one. And multitudes believed them.

And again: although v.24 had its fulfilment in the first century, it also has great application to the centuries that followed; an ongoing, wider application to all Christians in all ages. For *many* false Christs and false prophets have arisen through the centuries! In particular there is the false Christ in the Vatican – the pope of Rome, the very Antichrist prophesied of in God’s Word. And there are the false Christs of the Roman Catholic priesthood, each priest claiming to be “another Christ”, with the very powers of Christ Himself supposedly given to him. And there is also the false Christ of the Roman Catholic mass.

As for the “signs and wonders”: these are the numerous “miracles”, the demonically clever tricks, of the Roman Catholic institution over the centuries: “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9). The Papacy has been full of such lying wonders: supposed miracles performed by so-called “saints”, images that have talked or shed blood or tears, apparitions of “Mary”, etc., etc.

And all one has to do is consider today’s “Catholic Charismatic

Movement"! It is *full* of supposed "great signs and wonders", which are "lying wonders" indeed. Priests, nuns, and other Papists claiming to have "gifts of healing" and "working of miracles", speaking in "tongues" and "prophesying"! Not just a few, but tens of millions of them around the world make these claims. False prophets indeed, claiming that these gifts are still being given today. And yet they continue worshipping Mary and believing all the demonic lies of Romanism. They are deceivers, and are deceived themselves.

The elect cannot be ultimately deceived; but the deception is so great that (as this verse indicates) many of the elect are *almost* persuaded to believe these deceivers; and some of the elect *are* persuaded to believe them – for a time, at least. Such is the immense power of deception emanating from Rome.

And in addition to the greatest deception, and the greatest number of deceivers, false Christs and false prophets, arising from within Roman Catholicism, there have been, and are, many others as well, in the various cults and false religions which abound everywhere.

There is another aspect to this as well: the Jesuits of Rome have deliberately helped to set up men, claiming to be false Christs and prophets, so as to lead men and women astray by getting them to believe in and follow these deceivers! Undercover, they have backed a number of men who have made such claims. This is part of their "divide and conquer" strategy to undermine Protestantism, and to confuse men, so that they can ultimately draw them all back under the Papacy.

v.25: "*Behold, I have told you before.*"

In Mk. 13:23 the words are, "But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things." Jesus gave these warnings in Matt. 24:23,24 so that His disciples would not be deceived by the false Christs and false prophets. He told them before they arose, so that they would be forewarned; for to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

And the same is true, even for us, and for all Christians in all ages: the Lord has put such warnings in His Word, that we may be forewarned and thus forearmed.

The elect *will be* preserved; and they are kept from deception by faith in Christ and His Word. We need to take very careful heed to His Word, and to the warnings in it.

In addition, we may apply the words of Matt. 24:25 and Mk. 13:23 to *all* that the Lord had been prophesying about: not just to the warnings He had given about false Christs and prophets, but to *everything* that He had already told them would come to pass. This is shown by the way the words are given in Mark: “Behold, I have foretold you all things.” All things concerning the destruction of the Jewish nation, capital city, and temple; all the signs which would occur before that destruction; and thus He had answered them in detail as to the signs of His coming in judgment upon that nation – His answer to their question in v.3 (although not quite what they had been expecting). There were a number of signs, pointing to His soon coming in judgment upon the nation; and there are signs pointing to His second coming at the end of the world as well. He has told us beforehand, so that we may discern these signs of the times.

One more thing from v.25: when all these signs came to pass, and these false Christs and prophets arose, the Christians would remember that Jesus had warned them and foretold all these things; and it would be a further evidence to them of His omniscience! Only God is all-knowing; and therefore Jesus of Nazareth is the true Messiah, the Christ of God, the Son of God, God the Son!



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY: THE COMING OF CHRIST

MATTHEW 24:26-31

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.

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

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.

v.26: *“Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth”.*

The false prophets were not to be believed then, and they are not to be believed today. If any man said to the Christians at that time that the Christ was in a desert somewhere (such as the desert of Judea), no Christian was to believe them, nor go to that place to find out if it was true or not. For it was never going to be true!

False prophets at that time often went out into solitary desert places,

where they could more easily deceive their followers. History records details about some of them. As we have seen, one was Simon the son of Giora: during the siege of Jerusalem, he convinced many thousands of Jews to join him in the mountainous and desert parts of Judea. Jonathan, another one, did the same.

v.26: “*behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.*”

Some would say that Christ was in the desert, whereas others would say that He was in the “secret chambers.” Either way, Christians were not to be deceived by them. They were liars, false prophets. But what do the “secret chambers” refer to?

Jesus was referring to the secret, or fortified, chambers of the temple in Jerusalem. There was even a chamber called “the chamber of secrets” in the temple! For a period of time during the siege of Jerusalem, two leaders of the zealots, John and Eleazar, hid in the temple’s chambers. Also, some Jews had a false notion that the Messiah was born on the day Jerusalem was destroyed, but that he was then hidden in a secret place because of their sins, to be revealed at a later time. Some taught that he was hidden in the sea; others, that he was hidden in the garden of Eden; and still others, that he sat among the lepers at Rome’s gates!

Jesus therefore anticipated this false notion of theirs, and prophesied about it before it came to pass. And He thereby again showed His omniscience: that He is God, all-knowing, able to predict the future, able to reveal all the thoughts, plots and schemes of men.

Of course, the Messiah had come already, and had been rejected by the Jews. They had said, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Lk. 19:14); and therefore God had given them up to judgment and destruction. For to all their other shocking sins they had added this, the greatest of all: the rejection of their Messiah, the Anointed of God!

This verse, then, had its fulfilment at that time. But even so, there is more for us in it than simply seeing prophecy fulfilled in the events of that first century, as wonderful as this is. We may certainly apply these words to *all times* of the Christian era, *including our own!* For throughout the Christian era there have been false Christs and false prophets; and *whenever* they say, “He is here”, or, “He is there”, we are not to believe them. Consider:

“Behold, he is in the desert”. In past times, Roman Catholic hermits

would often retire to deserts to live in solitude; and they would claim that Christ was there in the desert with them. People would go out into those desert places to consult with them, because they supposed they were “holy men”, with great wisdom. And in addition to solitary hermits, entire monasteries would be built in desert places, with the monks claiming to be especially close to God and Christ out there; and people would go to them, to (as they vainly thought) draw closer to Christ.

Or, we can take “the desert” to be referring, in a spiritual sense, to a *spiritual wilderness*; for in Revelation, the true Church is symbolically spoken of as being on “a great and high mountain” (Rev. 21:10), the mystical Mount Zion; whereas the Great Whore, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots, which is the Roman Catholic institution, is said to be “in the wilderness” (Rev. 17:3). And this is because this false “church” does not have the water of life, nor the bread of life in it; its people are in a spiritual wilderness, a dry and thirsty land where no water is; for it is a false religion, a deception.

And in a more general sense this is true of *all* false Christs and prophets, who deceive people, regardless of what form their false religion takes. Not only the Papacy, but all who claim to be Christ, or who claim to be the prophets of the Lord. They are all in a spiritual desert, and they deceive multitudes into following them into that same spiritual wilderness.

“Behold, he is in the secret chambers”. The “secret chambers” can be understood as the place where the Roman Catholic “wafer god” is kept by the priests! For they believe that the consecrated “host” (as they call the piece of bread after the priest has prayed over it) *is* Christ. It is kept in a box, a receptacle, locked up – a “secret chamber” indeed. And the blinded Papists flock to it, bow before it and worship it, thinking they are worshipping *Christ*.

We are not to “go forth” after, or to “believe” every person who comes along with a message to proclaim! John writes, “*many* false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). And Paul writes that Christians must not be “carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). Deception is everywhere. And millions *are* deceived!

v.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.*”

Essentially the same thing is to be found in the sister-passage of Lk. 17:23,24. And again, keeping it in its context, it is evident that this does not, in the first instance, refer to Christ’s *second* coming! It refers to His *coming in judgment* upon the Jewish nation in AD 70, through the instrumentality of the Romans. It was sudden, like lightning flashing across the sky; and it was very clear that it was the Lord’s judgment, just as lightning is very visible, and a sign of an impending deluge. *This* was how He “came” to them: it was a coming in judgment; and therefore it was foolish of them to still be looking for Him afterwards in deserts and in secret chambers (v.26).

v.28: “*For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*”

Truly, the Jewish nation, by its sins, had become a carcase in the eyes of the Lord. Rotten, putrefying and vile. The Son of God had been rejected, the glory of God had departed, the temple had been left desolate, and God had turned from the Jews to the Gentiles. Truly, it was like a carcase now! Dead, stinking, corrupt, defiled, rejected, rotten to the very core.

The Romans were the eagles. And what perfect symbolism this is. For the *ensign* of the Romans was the eagle! Every legion had an eagle as its ensign, made of gold or silver, and carried aloft. The legions were like an eagle that fell upon that dead, rotten thing, the Jewish nation. “From thence she [the eagle] seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she” (Job 39:29,30). This is precisely what the Roman soldiers did, as they swept down upon the Jews throughout the land, and upon Jerusalem in particular. Just as a mighty eagle swoops upon its prey with its cruel talons and beak, so the Romans fell upon the Jews.

In Luke, the words of the Lord are: “Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together” (Lk. 17:36,37). The Roman soldiers would take one Jewish man and kill him, and leave another; which is why the disciples asked where they would be taken.

Jesus replied that they would be killed by the Roman soldiers, who would besiege and finally destroy the nation.

This verse was not only fulfilled by what happened at Jerusalem, but in *all* places where the Romans slaughtered the Jews. Following Jerusalem's destruction, 1700 Jews surrendered at Macherus, and were put to death. In the forest of Jardes, some 3000 were killed. In Caesaria, when Titus celebrated the birthday of Domitian his brother, he put to death over 2500 Jews, who were killed by fire, by being torn apart by wild beasts, and by gladiatorial fighting. Then, when the Jewish fortress of Masada was besieged, the Jewish commander, Eleazar, ordered the men to kill all the women and children, and then themselves, rather than surrender to the Romans. Almost a thousand Jews died in this way.

Thereafter, the rebellion of the Jews was finally over. They simply could not resist or rise up any longer. Their capital was in ruins, their entire country was a wasteland. The Roman eagles had triumphed over the Jewish carcase.

But although this verse was fulfilled in those times, who can fail to see, in these words, a foreshadowing of the *second coming* of Christ to this world, on the last day? As we have seen so often before, the Lord's prophetic words were fulfilled in the first century; but they also had a typical meaning. They typified His second coming to this earth! Just as the destruction of the Jewish nation typified the destruction of the entire world at Christ's second coming, so these two verses (Matt. 24:27,28) typify the second coming as well:

“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.” As sudden, clear and bright, as that coming in judgment upon the Jews was, so shall be the glorious physical return of Christ Jesus to this earth on the last day – as other Scriptures reveal. For example, 2 Thess. 2:8 speaks of “the brightness of his [second] coming”. And just as the city of the Jews was burnt with fire, and as lightning brings fire, so Christ will come suddenly like a flash of lightning, to take vengeance on His enemies in flaming fire, as taught in 2 Thess. 1:6-10: “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming

fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”

There is, also, Rev. 1:7: “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him”. Just as lightning comes from the clouds, so the Lord Jesus, when He returns, will come with the clouds! His coming as the lightning shows that we must look for Him to return, *not* from secret places and desert places, but from *heaven*.

Yes, there are many similarities, many parallels, between the Lord’s coming in judgment upon the Jews, and His second coming to judge the whole world – and deliberately so; which is why we may certainly refer to this verse, and others like it in this chapter, when seeking to understand the events at the second coming!

“For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.” If we take the “eagles” to mean, more literally, *vultures*, which are carrion-eaters and are drawn to a carcase, the elect will be “gathered together unto Him” at His second coming, like vultures to a carcase. “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our *gathering together unto him*” (2 Thess. 2:1); and, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout... and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be *caught up together with them* in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16,17). Where Christ is, His people will be gathered together unto Him.

The problem some have with this is that it means our blessed Lord, the Prince of life, is represented by a dead thing – a carcase. However, in the first place, the Lord was merely using an illustration, and besides, a carcase is life and food to a vulture. And in the second place, when we remember that we feed, spiritually, by faith upon “Christ crucified”, “the Lamb slain”, it makes a lot more sense. Christ crucified and slain is the very heart of the Gospel, for we are saved by a crucified Saviour! And the elect flock to Him like vultures to a carcase, and feed upon Him: “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed,” He

Himself said in Jn. 6:55; and also, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you” (v.53). Of course, He meant that believers eat and drink of Him spiritually, by faith; but even so He had no problem illustrating it in this way, and thus we are on very safe ground to interpret Matt. 24:28 this way as well.

Then there is Job 39:27-30, part of which was quoted above. The entire passage reads: “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 blood: and where the slain are, there is she.” This entire passage can be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to believers in Him, who (spiritually) “suck up blood”. And there can be no question that Jesus had v.30 in mind when He spoke the words of Matt.24:28.

v.29: “*Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened*”.

Futurists apply this to what they call the “seven-year tribulation” which they believe will occur at the end of the world, between their “secret rapture” and Christ’s second coming. But this is all nonsense. There is no seven-year tribulation right at the end, for there is no gap of seven years (or three and a half years as some say) between Christ’s coming for His people, and then His coming in judgment upon the world. It all takes place at the same time! The Christian Church goes through tribulation *throughout* its existence – throughout all the centuries it has been on the earth. And Christ Jesus returns once, visibly, gloriously, on the last day, and He gathers His people to Himself and judges the world. There is *no* so-called “two-stage coming” of Christ!

But we must put v.29 in context. What tribulation was the Lord Jesus speaking of, here? The “great tribulation” of v.21, of course: “For then shall be great tribulation”. And what was that? As we have seen, it was the tribulation upon the *Jews* when the Romans besieged Jerusalem, then destroyed it, put over a million Jews to death, took over 90 000 captive, and destroyed their temple. This is allowing the context to speak for itself.

What, then, is the Lord teaching here?

Immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the nation itself, in the year AD 70, the following events would occur: the

sun would be darkened, the moon would not give its light, and the stars would fall from heaven.

Some Futurists try to explain these words by saying that although Jesus said “immediately after”, the prophets often spoke of very distant events as if they were about to come to pass; and also, one day is with the Lord as a thousand years. But to interpret the words, “immediately after”, as referring to events 2000 years later is just too much of a stretch! No, Jesus meant *immediately after* that destruction.

And v.34 settles it anyway: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” It means the generation which was alive when the Lord spoke these words would experience these terrible things! They would occur not long after the Lord prophesied of them – a mere four decades later, in fact. Many of those alive at the time when Jesus gave this prophecy would have still been alive then.

Knowing, therefore, the time when this verse would be fulfilled, we are now able to understand its meaning.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened”. Thanks to the dominance of the Futurist theory of prophetic interpretation in our day, professing Christians have become accustomed to interpreting these words *literally*; but in the context of the events after AD 70, it must be read *figuratively*. Futurists say that at the end of time this will literally happen. Now it is true that when Christ returns at the last day, the Bible very plainly teaches that the entire universe will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:1-13). Matt. 24:39, however, is not referring to that universal destruction on the last day! In context here, as Jesus continued His discourse about what would happen in that first century AD, He meant us to understand these words figuratively, not literally. And we may be certain of this, for two very good reasons.

The first is, because of the obvious historical fact that immediately after the tribulation of AD 70, the sun was *not* literally darkened, nor the moon, and nor did the stars literally fall from the sky! It just did not happen. And the second reason is, because the Lord Jesus was speaking to Jews, who knew that their Scriptures use precisely such *figurative* language in various prophecies. For example, Isa. 13:10; 24:23; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:31.

What, then, is this all about?

It refers to the presence of the Lord God in the temple at Jerusalem; the glory of the Lord filling that place. For the Lord Himself is said in His Word to be a sun and shield (Psa. 84:11); the Son of God Himself is called “the Sun of righteousness” (Mal. 4:2); and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle when it was erected and dedicated (Exod. 40:34,35), and later the temple as well (1 Kings 8:10,11): God took up residence, as such, in the very Holy of holies!

And although it is true to say that for a long time, already, *before* its destruction, the glory of God had departed, and “*Ichabod*” had been written across it (see Matt. 23:38), yet even so the *token* of His presence remained within it until its final destruction in that year. And when that happened, “the sun was darkened” figuratively. The temple was no more, and God Himself, the Sun, who had been the light and warmth of Israel, was no longer present with the Jews as a nation.

The sun was darkened! The light of Israel was no longer there! Christ, the light of the world, was present in all His elect, of course, and shone out of them as the Sun of righteousness; but Israel as a nation had been forsaken.

v.29: “*and the moon shall not give her light*”.

The moon, here, represents *the ceremonial law*. This was that part of the law God gave to Israel through Moses, which was not eternal, but temporary; and which had to do with the religious rites, ceremonies and observances of the nation of Israel, from the time of Moses until the time of the Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfilled it and abrogated it (Col. 2:16,17). It consisted of such things as the sacrificial system, the priesthood, the types and shadows, and the temple.

But how may we be certain that this is what the moon symbolises in this verse?

The observance of new moons was a part of that ceremonial law, and the Jewish feasts were regulated by the cycles of the moon; and also, that law was alterable, like the phases of the moon – it did not last forever. The eternal, absolute law of God lasts forever; it is never altered; but the ceremonial law was temporary, it was alterable, and Christ Himself abrogated it! When the Lord Jesus Christ died, the ceremonial law was abolished, for He was the antitype of it all, and His light is true, whereas the light of the ceremonial law was merely

derived light, reflected light, just as the light of the moon reflects the light of the sun.

The Jews continued to observe the ceremonial law for decades after Christ had died, until in the year AD 70 the temple was destroyed; and then the ceremonial observances ceased once and for all, for now they could not be performed! Without the temple, they could not sacrifice.

v.29: “*and the stars shall fall from heaven*”.

In Rev. 1:20, “stars” represent ministers; and thus “stars falling from heaven” would represent ministers falling from sound doctrine and conduct; apostatising. And in the light of this, we are able to understand Jesus’ words here to be referring to the *Jewish rabbis and teachers of the law*. For those men, who sat in Moses’ seat (Matt. 23:2) and should have been the spiritual leaders of the Jews, teaching them the ways of the Lord and the way of salvation, instead set up their own traditions alongside the Word of God, and thus were “fallen stars”: men who held a position they did not deserve, and for which they were totally unqualified, spiritually; blind leaders of the blind, as Jesus called them. See Matt. 15:1-3,9,12-14; Matt. 23:13.

This verse says that they “fell” *after* that tribulation; but this does not mean they were not “fallen stars” *before* AD 70. They were! But after that terrible destruction, they began to manifest their true natures even more openly, for all to see, and began to interpret their traditions in various ways, with endless debates about the things in their Talmud, etc., etc. Even the Jewish teachers themselves mention that at this time their teachers split into parties, there were declensions, no real studying of the law, much ignorance of it, etc.

v.29: “*and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken*”.

This refers to the ordinances of the ceremonial law. These being shaken and removed, the Gospel ordinances came in their place. Haggai had prophesied that this would happen, in Hag.2:6, as explained by Heb. 12:26,27.

The sister-passage in Lk. 21:24-26 says: “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with

perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." The context shows that it is very clearly about those events of the first century, in Judea: see vv.20-26.

Verse 24 says, "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations." Immediately after the siege of Jerusalem, when the city was taken by the Romans, Jews were led captive and sold as slaves. They were sent as captives into Egypt, to work as slaves in the mines there; and many others were scattered throughout the Roman provinces, with many of them ending up in the amphitheatres to be killed by gladiators, or wild beasts, for the amusement of the people.

But that was not the end of it. The Jews continued to be led away captive into all nations in the years and decades following AD 70. Over four decades later during the reign of Hadrian, when the Jews had greatly increased in number in Judea again, the Romans destroyed 985 Jewish towns and killed 580 000 Jews in battle, with huge numbers more dying by famine, sickness, and fire – and vast numbers of men and women, of all ages, were then made captives, and sold into slavery into the nations of the earth. When Hadrian built a new city on Mount Calvary, naming it Flia, he forbade any Jew to come near it. On the very ruins of the great temple of the Lord, he built a temple to the heathen god Jupiter Capitolinus. In anger the Jews burnt the city, but Hadrian rebuilt it, deliberately erecting a marble image of a *pig* over its main gate, and forbade any Jew from entering the city on pain of death. In fact, they were forbidden from even *looking* at the city from a distance! In addition, every year fairs were held for the sale of Jewish captives. Those who dwelt there were banished to Egypt. Later, when Constantine gave to the city the name of Jerusalem again, he did not permit any Jews to live there, and those who tried to regain control of it had their ears cut off, their bodies branded, and were scattered throughout the Roman Empire as slaves.

Truly, the prophecy of the Lord has been fulfilled! Ever since that fateful year of AD 70, the Jews were scattered among all nations, and persecuted by slavery, banishment, and death wherever they went, year after year, century after century.

Next, Lk. 21:24 says, “and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” Futurists interpret these words as referring to our own times, and to the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948. But this is an error. It is incorrect to assume that “the times of the Gentiles” have ended now, because the Jews have Jerusalem back! Vast numbers of modern Jews, as explained earlier, are in fact *of Gentile descent* today. And furthermore, “the times of the Gentiles” ends only with the second coming of Christ!

Futurists teach that “*until* the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” means that something happens *afterwards*: the Jews get Jerusalem back. But that little word, “until”, does not mean there is something afterwards at all. Since “the times of the Gentiles” extends to the second coming of Christ, the verse can be understood this way: Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, *until* the very last day!

These words mean that Jerusalem would, *ever after AD 70*, be trodden down of the Gentiles. Ever since that fateful year, non-Jewish people have trodden it down. It was in the hands of the Romans, the Saracens, the Franks, the Roman Catholic Crusaders, the Turks, and the British. “It has always been trodden down. The eagles of idolatrous Rome, the crescent of Mahomet, and the banner of Popery, have by turns been displayed amidst the ruins of the sanctuary; and a Mahomedan mosque...now covers the spot where the Temple formerly stood.”⁴³

When the modern state of Israel was created in the twentieth century, this was *not* the fulfilment of any prophecy. The Jewish people today are not God’s special people. Individual Jews are converted to Christ, just as people from all other nations are; but God is not dealing nationally with the Jewish nation today – which does not even consist, for the most part, of the direct descendants of the Jews of old!

Lk. 21:25 says, “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars”. This we have seen, from Matt. 24:29.

“And upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity”. The “earth” could refer to the land of Israel, which the Jews called “the earth”, at times; and which had a number of “nations” belonging to it, such as Galilee of the Gentiles, Judea, Samaria, and the region beyond Jordan. It was a time of great distress and trouble, such as never before; and not only the Jews themselves were distressed, but the neighbouring

lands as well. It was a time of great perplexity.

“The sea and the waves roaring”. Figuratively, this speaks of the “sea” of the nations (for Old Testament prophets spoke of the nations of the world as a wild, roaring sea), all churned up, filled with anger towards the Jews, roaring upon them as the Romans did. Certainly we have at least one account, from history, of a certain literal fulfilment of these words: as Vespasian marched against Judea, he came to Joppa, a seaside city on the Mediterranean. The Jews in Joppa fled to their ships, but were unable to escape because a great tempest caused their ships to crash into one another, or onto the rocks, or overturn at sea. Many were drowned, many others killed themselves, and those who made it to the shore were killed by the Romans. 4200 Jews perished, their bodies scattered along the coast, and the sea was bloodstained.

Then, Lk. 21:26 says, “men’s hearts failing them for fear”. Truly, the Jews were filled with fear at this time!

Then it says, “and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth”. That is, on the land of Judea.

Then, “for the powers of heaven shall be shaken”. As in Matt. 24:29.

Returning, then, to Matt. 24:29: we have seen the fulfilment in the first century AD; now we must examine it as foreshadowing *the second coming*.

There was that “great tribulation” upon the Jewish nation in the first century; but also, the Bible makes it clear that the Christian Church goes through “great tribulation” as well, which lasts till the end of the world. For example, Jn. 16:33 says, “In the world ye shall have tribulation”. Acts 14:21,22 says, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” 1 Thess. 3:3,4 says, “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation: even as it came to pass, and ye know.” Rev. 7:13,14 says, “And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest.

And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Many more verses could be given. Christians in all ages of the Gospel era have suffered great tribulation.

But immediately *after* all the tribulation of the days between AD 70 and the end of the world, when Christ returns, the very universe itself will be shaken, and pass away as well (2 Pet. 3:8-13)! And truly, then, worldwide, the events typified by what is described in Lk. 21:25,26 will come to pass!

Thus, “after the tribulation of those days”, when applying this passage antitypically to the second coming, refers to *all* the tribulation which the Church passes through; for it is very true that the elect go through “great tribulation” throughout the entire Christian era.

Therefore, when looking at v.29 as foreshadowing Christ’s second coming, we may apply it *literally*: the universe will be destroyed! When Christ appears in all His glory, the sun and moon will be darkened, as a candle’s light is as nothing in the light of the sun. And then they will be destroyed. And thereafter, there will be no need of the sun or moon anymore: “And there shall be no night there [in heaven]; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:5).

But just as we are to understand this verse to be speaking *figuratively*, when applied to the events after AD 70; so we may also understand these words figuratively when applying them to the time of Christ’s return. For the heavenly bodies are said to “rule” over the day and night (Gen. 1:16-18); and thus they represent the rulers of this earth, and their darkening represents the putting down of all rule, authority and power, which occurs when Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:24,28).

v.30: “*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven*”.

Many have been the speculations as to what this sign will be. But the truth is simple: this “sign of the Son of man” is *the Son of man Himself!* How may we come to this conclusion?

First, by the fact that the Lord Jesus is called a “sign” elsewhere: “And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against” (Lk. 2:34). The Lord said

to Ezekiel the prophet, “I have set thee for a sign unto the house of Israel” (Ezek. 12:6); and likewise, as we have just seen, the Lord Jesus at His first coming was set for a sign. And Jesus also spoke of His resurrection as a sign: “But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:39,40). It makes sense, then, that His coming in judgment upon the nation would be called a sign as well.

Second, by a comparison with Rom. 4:11: “And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision”. As circumcision is called “the *sign* of circumcision” there, so the Son of man is called “the *sign* of the Son of man” here.

And third, in the sister-passages in the other Gospels, the “sign” is not mentioned, but only the Son of man Himself: “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory” (Mk. 13:26); “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Lk. 21:27).

Christ Jesus appeared at the time of this judgment, not in person, but in power, wrath and vengeance, against the Jewish nation. And the judgment upon the Jews was in itself sufficient evidence that *He* had come in judgment upon them! For when the destruction came, it was solid proof to all that Christ had indeed come in the flesh, and that He was now coming in judgment upon them for rejecting Him – just as He had prophesied would happen. It was as perfect a proof as if they had seen Him come personally in the heavens! When He was on earth, they kept on demanding a sign from Him, and now they had one. And what a terrible one it was!

But although these words of the Lord were fulfilled at that time, those events also typified things to occur at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the last great day, He will appear personally in the heavens! The Bible is very clear about this. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with

the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16,17); “and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7,8).

v.30: “*and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn*”.

As applied to Christ’s spiritual coming in judgment upon the Jews, this does not mean the tribes of the whole world would mourn, but rather the twelve tribes of Israel. The land of Judea was known to them as “*the earth*”. Nor did other nations suffer in this judgment; in fact, the Gentiles rejoiced at this destruction! They did not mourn.

But as applied antitypically to His second coming, the meaning is the same as in Rev. 1:7: “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.” Believers will rejoice at His return, but the majority will mourn. The tribes of the whole earth, the heathen who have rejected Him, will mourn and weep and wail, being filled with dread!

v.30: “*and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*”

Compare these words of the Lord with what He said in Matt. 26:64, in reply to the high priest when he asked Him if He was the Christ, the Son of God: “Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” Jesus meant the Jews in Matt. 26:64, and He meant the Jews in Matt. 24:30 as well. For He was referring to the same event in both places! He was referring to His coming in wrath and vengeance, as the Judge, to destroy that nation, using the instrumentality of the Roman army. It was a time of darkness (cloudiness) to them; and many of them came to realise that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had crucified and rejected a mere four decades earlier, was indeed the Messiah, as He had said and proved; and that He was now come to wreak vengeance on them.

But certainly, we may see in these words a type of the end of the world, and of the second coming. For when the last day arrives, Christ will appear *visibly*, on the clouds of heaven; and the nations (tribes) of the whole world will *see* Him! This is what the Bible plainly teaches.

“Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot” (Psa. 104:3); “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11); “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him” (Rev. 1:7).

His first coming was in weakness; His second will be in power and glory! See, for example, 2 Cor. 13:4; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16.

v.31: “*And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet*”.

Although the events of the first century typified events at the end of the world, the fact remains that the Lord Jesus was, here, still speaking of His judgment of the Jewish nation, and what would follow that. And in that light, and in the context, this verse is to be understood figuratively, as so much in this chapter is.

The Greek word which we translate as “angel” simply signifies “messenger”; and is, in fact, applied to ministers of the Gospel in Rev. 2 and 3. Therefore, by “angels”, here in v.31, are meant the human “messengers”, the ministers of the Gospel, who are sent into all the world to preach the Gospel to the lost! They are called “angels” because they are messengers; because they have a heavenly message, and a heavenly commission; and because, like the angels in heaven, they are devoted to the Lord’s service.

The “sound of the trumpet” refers to the *Gospel*, which faithful ministers preach! Moses made trumpets to call the assembly, for use on their feast days, and for other purposes (Num. 10:1-10); and this is what the Gospel does – it calls people to Christ. Also, the Jubilee trumpet was blown, proclaiming liberty to the captives – just as the Gospel does, in a far higher and spiritual sense. In a prophecy of Christ, Isaiah said, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings [the Gospel] unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives [the antitypical Jubilee], and the opening of the prison

to them that are bound [held in the prison of sin and of Satan's power]; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord [the Gospel Jubilee]" (Isa. 61:1,2). It is also to the Gospel trumpet that Isaiah referred when he prophesied, using the language style of the Old Testament: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem" (Isa.27:13). Truly, it is as the psalmist called it, "the joyful sound" (Psa. 89:15) – the sound of glad tidings, of free and full salvation by a crucified Saviour!

We could therefore paraphrase the Lord's words here in v.31 as follows: "And Christ shall send His preachers with a heavenly message, with the great Gospel sound, into all the world!" It is nothing less than the Great Commission: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15)! And indeed this is shown by the very next words:

v.31: "*and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*"

By the preaching of the Gospel the elect of God are gathered in! They are gathered *out* of the world, *unto* Christ, and *into* His true Church (Jn. 11:52). From wherever they are in the whole world, as the Gospel goes forth into all the world, under the whole heaven, the elect are gathered in, as Mark records the Lord's words on this occasion: "And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven" (Mk. 13:27). It describes the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the whole world, in the centuries that followed the destruction of Jerusalem.

But of course, who can fail to see that verses 30 and 31 also sound extremely similar to what we know from other parts of Scripture regarding the second coming of Christ? It is true that each one of the elect is gathered to Christ by effectual calling; but there is also another gathering together unto Him, which occurs on the last day as He returns from heaven! For example, 1 Thess. 4:16,17 and 1 Cor. 15:52 speak of the sound of a trumpet, and of the gathering together of all the elect, the living and the dead, on the last day.

And the holy angels will be involved in this great work of gathering the elect together, to Christ! For the angels act as His ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14), and serve Him as “officers of the court” on that great day. Under the law, trumpets were used for calling the assembly (Num. 10:2), and in proclaiming the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:9); and when Christ returns on the last day, the Church (consisting of all the elect, and only them), the “general assembly”, will be called, gathered together unto Christ, and believers will enter their eternal Jubilee.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

MATTHEW 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.

v.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”.*

Jesus often used things in nature to illustrate His teaching. When the leaves started to appear on the fig trees of Judea, and the little green figs, it was a sign that spring had come, and summer was not far off. “For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone... the fig tree putteth forth her green figs” (Song. 2:11,13). And the Lord’s disciples were to learn something important from this:

v.33: *“So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things”.*

What things? The things which the Lord mentioned in the preceding verses, concerning the destruction of the city and the temple.

v.33: *“know that it is near, even at the doors.”*

When the Christians saw the earlier signs coming to pass, such as the arising of false prophets and false Christs, the gathering of the Roman armies against the city, etc., then they would know that “it”—the judgment and destruction of Jerusalem and of the nation—was very

near. Those things were like the budding of the fig tree, which would tell them that the summer-time of destruction and judgment was nigh.

Mark's Gospel is virtually identical to this verse, in Mk. 13:28,29; but Luke's Gospel adds some things which throw further light on the meaning of Matt. 24:32,33: "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Lk. 21:28-31).

Let us look at these things in Luke carefully:

Lk. 21:28: "*And when these things begin to come to pass*". What things? Again, the things Jesus had already said would happen at that time.

Lk. 21:28: "*then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*" Christians alive at that time, seeing and experiencing those momentous events, were not to be dismayed by them. They were not to hang their heads in despair, but to lift them up in prayer to the Lord, and lift them up in joyful anticipation, looking forward, by faith – knowing that their redemption was near!

What redemption was this? Not the redemption of their souls from sin, Satan, death, and hell, for this was accomplished already. And not the redemption of their bodies, for that only occurs on the last day, when the bodies of the saints will be resurrected, changed, glorified, and made fit for heaven. The meaning is that their *Redeemer Himself* drew nigh! Christ is the Redeemer of His people, and therefore He is their redemption! He is made redemption unto His people (1 Cor. 1:30).

Furthermore: up until then, the Christians in Judea had been very viciously persecuted by the Jews (as the book of Acts shows); but now, with that nation's destruction and the scattering of the Jews throughout the Gentile world, the terrible time of Jewish persecution would come to an end. Christians would still be viciously persecuted by the Gentiles; but for Jewish Christians, this was the end of that persecution at the hands of their countrymen.

And these words may be applied, in an antitypical sense, to the end

of the world and the return of our Lord. For as we watch the signs of the times given in the Scriptures, the signs of His return, beginning to come to pass, then truly we may lift up our heads in joyful anticipation. For, firstly, the second coming of Christ our Redeemer draws nigh; secondly, our redemption from all persecution draws nigh; and thirdly, the redemption of our bodies draws nigh, for on the last day the dead in Christ will be resurrected, and those alive at the time will be wonderfully changed!

Let us continue in Luke's Gospel:

Lk. 21:29,30: "*And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.*" This is exactly the same as in Matthew.

Lk. 21:31: "*So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*" Matthew says, "Know that it is near, even at the doors", with "it" meaning the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation; whereas Luke says, "know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." This may at first glance seem to present a problem. But there is really no difficulty at all: what the Lord meant was that the kingdom of God would be visibly and gloriously revealed in the destruction of His enemies, the Jews. The destruction of the city, temple, and nation, would be a visible display of His kingly power and authority over all the earth; as when one kingdom makes war against another kingdom and defeats it, then the victorious kingdom has come "nigh."

Consider the following:

Mk. 9:1 says, "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." When did "the kingdom of God come with power"? The Lord was speaking of the display of His kingly power, and thus of the kingdom of God coming with power, when He judged and punished that nation in AD 70. Some of those who were standing there listening to Him would still be alive when it happened.

In Matt. 16:28 the words are slightly different: "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." This coming is

obviously not His second coming on the last day, as that would only occur centuries in the future, but His coming in judgment upon the Jews in AD 70. By comparing these Scriptures, we find that His coming in His kingdom is the same as the kingdom of God coming in power. And this means Christ's coming in kingly power to judge the Jews. For at that time, those wicked Jews, who did not want Him to reign as King over them, experienced His power, authority and wrath *as King*, in their own destruction.

But Lk. 21:31 may be applied, also, to the end of the world, in an antitypical sense, and it teaches us that when we see the signs of the end of the world and Christ's return beginning to occur, we must know that the kingdom of God is very near; that is to say, the heavenly reign of Christ with His people. For this will follow immediately after the last day, as He takes all His people to be with Him in heaven, for ever and ever.

Thus again, the destruction of the Jews in AD 70 typified the far greater destruction at the end of the world, and the coming of the kingdom of God, meaning in this case the heavenly existence, for all His people with Him, never to be parted from Him again.

v.34: *“Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”*

Matt. 16:28 throws light on this verse. For “this generation” not passing away till all these are fulfilled, here in v.34, is the *same* in meaning as Matt. 16:28, where Jesus said that “some standing here shall not die, till they see” His kingdom coming in power. It means *that generation then alive*, when the Lord spoke these words, would be the very generation to experience these calamities. That very generation saw the prophecies of Daniel regarding Jerusalem's destruction being fulfilled. It was, therefore, clearly going to happen not that long after the Lord said these things. And indeed, forty years is not long, and many of those alive at the time when Jesus said these things would have still been alive then.

We know, for example, that John the apostle was still alive long after AD 70, for he wrote the book of Revelation towards the very close of the first century; and there were many other Christian disciples who would have lived to see those things as well. Many of the Jewish

religious teachers who persecuted Jesus when He ministered on earth were still alive at the time of the city's destruction – so it stands to reason that many Christians were also still alive.

This verse, then, is a very solid proof that all the things of which the Lord had been prophesying in this chapter were fulfilled *then*, and are not to be understood as being fulfilled at the end of the world and the second coming, except in an *antitypical* sense.

Mk.13:30 says the very same thing as Matt. 24:34; as does Lk. 21:32.

v.35: “*Heaven and earth shall pass away*”.

They will not last forever. The psalmist wrote, centuries earlier: “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end” (Psa. 102:25-27); and Paul refers to this text in Heb. 1:10-12: “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

But what exactly will happen to the heavens and the earth – the entire universe? The Bible says that the time is coming when they will be completely burned up and destroyed! “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10); “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1).

This physical universe will not last forever. As permanent as it appears to our sight, it is going to be destroyed. But there is something that *will* last forever! There is something that is absolutely permanent – more permanent and enduring than even the universe itself! And this is the Word of the Lord:

v.35: “*but my words shall not pass away.*”

Where do we find Christ's words? The entire Bible is His Word!

For He is God, and “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). By His Holy Spirit, He moved men to speak and write down His very words (2 Pet. 1:21). And all His words will come to pass. They will all be fulfilled. They are more certain and more lasting than the physical creation itself: “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:24,25).

But although it is true that all the words of the Lord will come to pass; none will fail; every single prophecy will be fulfilled; every single word will endure forever; they will never pass away; yet in this verse the Lord is referring, in particular (as is obvious from the context), to His words *in this chapter*: these prophecies would be fulfilled down to the minutest detail.

And Mk. 13:31 and Lk. 21:33 say precisely the same thing.

This verse, then, is not just teaching the great doctrine of the preservation of the Holy Scriptures in general; but in particular it is teaching that this prophecy of our Saviour was sure and certain, and would infallibly come to pass. And it did! These things were all wonderfully fulfilled in the first century AD already, some years after He returned to heaven.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AS THE DAYS OF NOAH: THE COMING OF CHRIST

MATTHEW 24:36-41

36. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

37. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38. 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,

39. And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

40. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

v.36: *“But of that day and hour knoweth no man”.*

Again, it is clear from the context that the Lord was referring to His coming in judgment upon the Jews in AD 70. The entire context reveals this. Moses had prophesied of it; so had other prophets of the Lord; and so did Christ here. But the *precise date* of its occurrence was unknown to the Jews. The very day and hour was unknown.

v.36: *“no, not the angels of heaven”.*

This is true of the holy angels, who encompass the very throne of God in the highest heaven. Even to them the day and hour had not been revealed. But it was also true of the ministers of the Gospel – for

they are called “angels” in v.31, and have a message from heaven to proclaim. They knew the *approximate* time, by the signs they saw; but they did not know the *precise* day, nor hour.

v.36: “*but my Father only.*”

Only God the Father knew the precise day and hour of this coming judgment.

In the sister-passage in Mk. 13:32, Mark adds a few words which Matthew does not mention. It says: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, *neither the Son, but the Father.*” But Jesus is God! Surely He knows everything?

He certainly does, *as God*. But the Lord Jesus, having come in the flesh, has two natures, the divine and the human; and this lack of knowledge is to be understood of Christ as *man*, not as God. As the Son of *God*, He lay in the Father’s bosom and knew all things (Jn. 1:18); but as *man*, He came to save, not to destroy; and therefore, as man and as Mediator, it was not His work to know, nor to make known, the exact day and hour. This is not what His Father had sent Him to do, as man.

But may the Lord’s words in this verse be applied, antitypically, to His second coming at the end of the world, as well? Yes, most certainly. Of the precise day and hour of Christ’s return, men and angels are ignorant. Anyone who claims to know the exact date, and to set such a date (as many cults do), is a deceiver, a liar, and a false prophet. No man knows it, and none ever will.

Believers will certainly be able to discern the signs of the times, and thus be able to calculate the *approximate* time. This is clear from v.33: they will know when the return of Christ is near, but never the precise day nor hour.

v.37: “*But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*”

This refers to His spiritual coming, to take vengeance on the Jews. “Noe” is one and the same with “Noah”. What were “the days of Noah” like? The Bible tells us. In his day, wickedness abounded (Gen. 6:5-7,11-13); and the first century AD was the same. The people of Noah’s day went about their business, unaware of what was going to occur; and so did the Jews prior to AD 70. The flood came suddenly; and so

did the destruction of the Jewish nation. “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” (v.27).

The sister-passage in Luke’s Gospel says: “For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man” (Lk. 17:25,26). This shows us that these words of the Lord refer to what happened in AD 70! For He said that His coming would be as the lightning; and *then* He says, “But first he must suffer many things, and be rejected of *this* generation” – meaning the generation then living, the generation to whom He was speaking. First He would suffer at the hands of that generation of Jews, and be rejected by them; and then (not that many years later) His spiritual coming in judgment would occur.

“And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.” Matthew says His coming; Luke says His days. The meaning is the same: when Christ came in judgment upon the Jews, those were His “days”! His days of vengeance; of wrath; of righteous retribution against that nation.

But also, these words of Jesus may be applied, antitypically, to the days of His second coming at the end of the world. The days at the world’s end will be “as the days of Noah”. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:5-8). “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Gen. 6:11-13).

In Noah's day, wickedness abounded universally. It will be the same when Christ returns. And truly, we see the world of today just like that of Noah's day! Truly, truly, we are in such days again! Truly, every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is evil continually!

Only Noah, of all men upon the face of the earth at that time, found grace in the Lord's eyes. And today, as we head towards the end of the world and the second coming of Christ, the *true* Church of Christ is a very small remnant, as Jesus Himself said: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:8). Very, very few find grace in the Lord's eyes. Hundreds of millions profess the Name of Christ, but only a tiny, tiny percentage of all those are truly regenerated, and saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

v.38: "*For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage*".

It is of course right to eat and drink for the sustenance of life, and to marry or be given in marriage. But the people of Noah's time were *given over* to earthly pleasures, luxury, etc., living for their bodily pleasures but with no concern for their souls. And this was also the general attitude of the Jews at the time of their destruction: they lived for their earthly pleasures, they lived for the moment, and had no concern for eternal things. Eating, drinking and marrying are all good things in themselves – but not if those things are seen as the be all and end all of existence, so that spiritual truth is disregarded.

Furthermore, history records that the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, so that the Jews were eating and drinking in a very special way, at that very time.

And applying it, secondarily, to the end of the world, there is another way in which we may understand these words of the Lord. They may be taken as referring to *sinful* eating and drinking, and to *sinful* marriages (for these were certainly taking place before the flood, as shown by Gen. 6:2,4). Sinful eating is gluttony, eating to excess; sinful drinking is drunkenness, or even the very use of intoxicating drinks;⁴⁴ and sinful marriages are those which the Lord forbids in His Word: marriages between siblings, between parent and child, or between other close relatives, are sinful (Lev. 18); and marriages between believers and unbelievers are sinful (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14; etc.). And although

State-sanctioned sodomite “unions” are *not* true marriages at all in the sight of the Lord, for marriage *cannot* be between two men or two women (Gen. 2:18,21-24; Matt. 19:4-6), yet because the world calls such abominations “marriages”, the Lord in Matt. 24:38 may have simply referred to them as the world commonly does. And these filthy “unions” are as wicked as anything entered into in the days of Noah!

In the world today, we find sodomite “unions” being flaunted everywhere, promoted and protected by governments, with those who oppose them being considered enemies of the State, liable for severe prosecution. And there are agitations for all kinds of other sinful “unions” to be declared legitimate marriages as well.

Never in world history have things been so abominable – except at the time of Noah. Truly, we are living at the very end of time. Feasting, drunkenness, sexual debauchery, violence abounding everywhere, the thoughts of men’s hearts only evil continually (Gen. 6:1-5,11-13)! *This* is the world we now live in. *This* is the world just prior to the second coming of the Lord. And this is true, not only of those who are openly in the world, but even the majority of those professing to be “Christians” as well! They are not *true* Christians, but they *claim* to be; and they demonstrate that they are not, by living like the world, thinking like the world, and letting the world dictate their attitudes, values, and everything else. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15).

v.38: “*until the day that Noe entered into the ark*”.

The people in Noah’s day continued in their sins, and even in those things which are not sinful in themselves but are merely of an earthly nature, having no concern for their souls, right up until the very day that Noah went into the ark and the flood began! They carried on with their lives with absolutely no concern for their eternal souls at all, until the very last moment. Noah entered the ark, the Lord shut the door, the rain started to fall and the waters started to gush out of the bowels of the earth. But by then it was too late.

v.39: “*And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away*”.

The people of Noah’s day were utterly careless and indifferent. Certainly Noah preached to them (2 Pet. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:18-20), but they

paid no heed to his faithful ministry. They mocked his message, and they mocked him; they did not believe there would be any flood; they were judicially blinded.

This is why they were casually going about their normal lives, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. They were secure in their own minds; and because they felt secure in their minds they were sensual in practice. This is always the case. When men feel secure, when they have no concern for their souls, then they are led into sins of the flesh. They were taken up with earthly things, and had no time for heavenly things. They heard Noah preach; they heard his warnings; but they “knew not”, because they believed not! This is why they knew nothing until the flood was actually upon them. And so it was that the entire population of the earth drowned, except Noah and his family in the ark.

v.39: *“so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”*

Firstly, we must take it as meaning His spiritual coming in judgment upon the Jews in AD 70. Before that dreadful event, the Jews were living just as the people before the flood had lived. They were living in all kinds of sin; they ignored the warnings of Christ, and of His apostles; they did not believe that their city, temple and nation were about to be destroyed; and so they perished when it happened.

Secondly, we may apply it to Christ’s second coming, the first event being a type of the second. Sensuality and false security will mark the people of the world at the end of time. And is this not so very true of our own age, in which we are fast approaching the second coming of our Lord and Saviour? The world during Noah’s day went about its business, unaware of what was about to occur; and so it is now, as the end of the world approaches. Look around you! The signs are all there. As the days of Noah were, so are our days!

They “know not”! The people of the world pay no attention to the true preachers of the Word today. They do not believe what they hear. Just as the flood of Noah’s day came upon the world suddenly, and swept them all away, so the wrath of God is almost upon them today, but they know it not, for they believe not. They are eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, living in pleasure upon the earth, in wantonness and sensuality. They are living for the moment,

for this world alone; living as if there is no tomorrow.

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet. 3:3,4). In a word, this is uniformitarianism! Scientists telling the world that everything continues as it always has: there was no worldwide, catastrophic flood (despite the vast mass of evidence around the world for just such a global deluge as described in the Bible), and there will not be any worldwide destruction in the future. Everything, they assure us confidently, continues as it always has. And the world believes them. Worse yet, false “pastors” are saying the same thing, preferring to believe the lies of evolution than the divinely inspired Word of God!

Yes, indeed – “so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” The Lord Jesus Christ will return to such a world! A world that is “as it was in the days of Noah.” A world of violence, sexual sin and sensuality. A world where very, very few believe the Gospel, or believe that the world is soon to end. And *suddenly*, destruction will be upon them – and they will not know it until it is too late. The door of the ark will be shut by the Lord (Gen. 7:16), and the multitudes on the outside will then suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. The world’s destruction will be sudden, and totally unexpected, to the people of the world, as it says in 1 Thess. 5:1-4: “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”

The flood destroyed everyone except those on the ark – and so will the final destruction at the end of the world destroy everyone, except those in Christ: true believers.

There is another aspect of this which needs to be examined: the spiritual state of those who falsely profess to be “Christians”, as well as of true Christians, as the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ draws near.

In Matt. 25:5, as He taught His parable of the ten virgins, Jesus said, “While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.” And as

His return draws near, the vast majority who falsely call themselves Christians are slumbering away, secure in their comforts, pleasures, and sensual things; eating and drinking merrily, marrying and giving in marriage. They slumber and sleep when Christ the bridegroom comes at midnight (v.6). But as this parable shows, even the *true virgins* slumber! As the end of all things approaches, even *true* Christians are sleeping, or at least dozing, failing to watch the signs of the times, secure in their comforts, luxuries and toys. These things ought not so to be!

In the Gospel of Luke we are given further words of the Lord Jesus at this time, which Matthew does not record. After writing pretty much as does Matthew, about the days of the Son of man being as the days of Noah (see Lk. 17:26,27), Luke then adds that they would also be as the days of Lot. Lk. 17:28 says, “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded”. The time when Lot lived in Sodom was very similar to the time of Noah. On a much smaller scale, certainly, for this period in Lot’s life concerned only Sodom and a few other cities; but even so, the people of those cities were living in precisely the same wicked manner as the whole world was living at the time of Noah. And in a way the comparison between Sodom and its destruction, and Jerusalem and its destruction, is even more apt, for both were *cities*.

The verse says that the people of Sodom “did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded”. Ezek. 16:49 shows that this was the sin of the people of Sodom: they ate and drank because they were very rich; they had “fulness of bread”, and gorged themselves, as gluttons, living only for the moment.

Now the eating and drinking is the same as mentioned by Matthew as what was occurring in Noah’s day; but Luke adds that in addition, the people of Sodom “bought” and “sold”. In other words, they went on with their daily businesses, feeling secure, not for a moment suspecting that their city was about to be destroyed. And as Ezek. 16:49 declares, they did all this trade without any thought for the poor and needy. They did not try to help them, but instead oppressed them.

Luke also says that they “planted” and “builded”. They planted their fields, expecting that the next harvest would be just as the one before – no change to their lives. Their vineyards and fruit trees did

extremely well, because Gen. 13:10 says that Sodom and Gomorrah were well watered and fertile, “like the garden of the Lord” – Eden itself. And they built homes, and places to worship their false gods in. Life just went on.

And because of the great similarities between the days of Lot and the days of Noah, we are on safe ground in saying that this was what was happening in Noah’s day as well. The people of that time continued to buy and sell, to do business and trade, to carry on with agriculture and architecture; to build places of worship for their false gods.

It was just the same in Jerusalem, prior to that city’s destruction in AD 70. And it will be just like that prior to the second coming of Christ on the last day! Truly, we can see the evidence of this all around us. The world goes on its merry way, doing what it has always done, paying no heed to the warnings of God’s Word, or to those of the preachers of the Gospel.

Another thing which Lk. 17:28 shows, is just what kinds of “marriages” were taking place in Noah’s day as well. For the predominant sexual sin in Sodom was sodomy! And so, since Lot’s time and Noah’s time are being so closely compared in Luke’s account, we can safely say that sodomy was one of the great abominations being committed in Noah’s day as well. Although sodomite “marriage” is not legitimate marriage in the eyes of God, it was being treated as legitimate in that wicked city.

And it is the same today! It is now a worldwide phenomenon. Sodomites are openly flaunting their abomination, parading down the streets with State and police protection, being given all kinds of special legal rights, and those who oppose them are being treated as criminals and intolerant bigots. How utterly depraved, how upside down and back to front this world is – *all over again!*

Next, Lk. 17:29 says: “But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.” In precisely the same manner, as soon as the Lord’s elect, the Jewish Christians, had fled Jerusalem in obedience to Jesus’ words, the destruction occurred.

And it will be the same when Christ returns on the last day: all His elect who lie in the graves will be resurrected, and all His elect who

are alive on that day will be changed, to meet Him in the air; and *that same day*, the Lord will rain fire and brimstone upon the entire earth, and burn it all up! This is the clear teaching of 1 Thess. 4:14-18, and 2 Thess. 1:7-9.

We see from all this, then, that what happened to Sodom was a great type of what happened to Jerusalem, and what will happen at the end of the world. For in Noah's day a flood came and destroyed them all, but upon Sodom the Lord rained *fire*. And fire was used in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and fire will burn the entire world up when Christ returns.

Lk. 17:30 says, "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." In the days prior to AD 70, the Jews were feasting and fornicating, and believed they were safe and secure. And this will be just as true of the world's population at the time of the second coming of Christ! Indeed, as we look around the world today, this is what we see everywhere. And just as the destruction of Sodom was sudden, so was that of the Jews in the first century, and so will it be at the end of the world, as we have seen above.

Also, just as a tiny remnant was saved at the time of the flood, and at the time of Sodom's destruction; so the Jewish Christians were saved just before Jerusalem was destroyed; and so it will be on the last day as well, when Christ Jesus returns and gathers His elect to Himself in the air, in a moment of time, before destroying the world.

Next, in Lk. 17:31 Jesus said: "In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back."

This is very important because of *where* these words appear in Luke. He puts them *after* the description of the coming of the Son of man, whereas Matthew puts them *long before* this description (vv. 16-18). Why is this significant? It confirms, yet again, that all that Matthew says, and all that Luke says, can be (and *must* be) applied to what occurred in AD 70, *and* (antitypically) what will occur at the end of the world! For Matthew and Luke do not follow the same order or sequence, in relating these words; they mix them up, so to speak, because that is how Jesus gave them, and He wanted us to know that it is *not only* about AD 70, and it is *not only* about the end of the world

either – but both! The type and the antitype.

Then, in Lk. 17:32 the Lord said these very simple, but very important, weighty words: “Remember Lot’s wife.” Why are we told to remember her, at this point? It is because she looked back, with longing, to the world she was leaving behind, when the Lord rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom, and she became a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). It is a very good place to stop and reflect, and ask ourselves these all-important questions: Do I really love the Lord? Am I truly one of His? Am I tied to the things of this world, as Lot’s wife was? Everything is one day going to be burned up – do I care?

When Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, the Jewish Christians were to flee, leaving behind their houses and fields and possessions, and not to look back with longing; and when Christ returns, true Christians are not to be looking back with longing for the things of the world – for the world and its works will be burned up.

Lastly, there is Lk. 17:33: “Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.” These are words which Matthew records as well, but in other places entirely: Matt. 10:39 and 16:25. But this merely shows us that Jesus spoke these words on at least three different occasions. Matthew does not record them in chapter 24, because he recorded them on other occasions; but Luke puts them in at this point, and by comparing one Gospel with the other, we obtain a complete picture of what the Lord said on this occasion.

Whoever wants to save his physical life by keeping it safe, even by denying Christ, turning His back on Him after professing to be His disciple just so that he can save his own skin, will *lose* his life: he will be cast, body and soul, into hell forever. He proves thereby that he only ever *professed* to be a disciple; he was never one in truth. But he who loses his life for the sake of Christ, who loves the Lord supremely and is even prepared to die for Him, will *find* it: he will find it in heaven, and he will find it to be a greater life than anything he could have enjoyed on earth!

v. 40: “*Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*”

When is “then”? Read these words with the previous verse, and it

becomes clear: “so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. *Then* shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” These days, because Futurism has become the dominant prophetic theory of our times, these words are almost always applied solely to what is known as the “rapture”: Futurists tell us that they refer to the “secret” coming of the Lord, some years before His visible coming, when He snatches up the believers from the earth and leaves the rest to go through the “tribulation”. But if we read these words *in context* – as we always should – it is as plain as day that they *have to* fit what occurred in the *first century AD* as well. For the coming of the Son of man was also His coming in judgment upon the Jewish nation!

And indeed these words of the Lord *do* fit that time. For before the Romans descended upon them, the Jews were occupied at their employments, working in their fields, etc., going about their everyday business, when *suddenly* one was taken by the Roman eagles, killed or made captive, while in the providence of God another was left unharmed. The Romans left a few of the Jews, especially in the rural areas of the land.

But of course, who can fail to see in this a remarkable instance of how these words are also to be applied to the *second coming of Christ*? When our Saviour returns, Christians will *suddenly* be taken out of the world, to meet Him in the air – leaving the rest behind. The swiftness, the suddenness, of it, is shown in the prophecy of 1 Cor. 15:51,52: “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” This great event does not happen at some secret rapture seven years before the second coming of Christ on the last day, as Futurists imagine; it happens on the last day itself!

Although believers have to live and work side by side with the unregenerate, yet at the last day a separation will be made: the precious will be separated from the vile, the gold from the dross, the wheat from the chaff.

v.41: “*Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*”

It refers to the very same events: firstly, to the time when the Romans

came and took many away captive, but left some behind in the land. And secondly, to the time of the Lord's return, when Christian women will suddenly be taken up, to meet the Lord in the air, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; and the unbelievers will be left behind.

What a separation that will be! Even now, in this life, there is to be a separation between believer and unbeliever. Believers are to be separate from the world (2 Cor. 6:14-18). They are not to join with the people of the world in their sinful activities. But of course, believers live among unbelievers; they work side by side with them. When Christ returns, however, a *physical and everlasting separation* will occur between the two – and they will *never* be together again.

Let us turn to the sister-passage in Luke's Gospel. Lk. 17:34-36 says, "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

The words of verses 35 and 36 are essentially identical with Matthew; but v.34 adds something Matthew does not have: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left." The return of Christ will be at night for much of the world's population, and in the day-time for the rest of the world's population; for whenever He returns, it will be night in some places, and day in others.

But why does it say, two *men* shall be in one bed? There are two perfectly good explanations. The first is this: in the King James Version, the word, "men", is in italics. In fact, this is true in all three verses: "two *men* in one bed"; "two *women* grinding together"; "two *men* in the field". When the translators used italics, they did so to indicate that the italicised word is not found in the original Greek at this point, but they felt it necessary to add it for clarity's sake, in English. The verse in Greek reads, "There shall be two in one bed" – which would of course refer to a man and his wife, and this clears up the matter entirely. The translators would have used the word, "men", as referring to "people" in general, just as "mankind" is used to refer to both men and women.

And the second explanation is: the words can also be rendered in English as, “There shall be two men on one couch”; meaning, sitting together at a meal. For in those days, many people used to sit or recline on couches, or beds, when they ate; and in fact there was one such couch on which two men could sit together.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WATCH AND BE READY

MATTHEW 24:42-44

42. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

43. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

44. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

v.42: *“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”*

Jewish Christians living at that time had to be always watchful, being aware of the signs of the times, for they did not know the exact day, nor hour, when the Lord would come suddenly in judgment and vengeance upon their nation.

But certainly, we may see how these words are very applicable to Christ's second coming as well. John Gill has a very good comment at this point: after teaching that this refers to that coming in judgment upon the Jews in AD 70, he adds: “though I will not deny, but that what follows may be *much better accommodated and applied* to the second coming of Christ, and the last judgment, and the behaviour of men with regard to both, *than any thing said before*; and it may be our Lord's intention, to lead his disciples gradually, and as it were imperceptibly, to the last scene of things on earth, to make way for the parables and description of the future judgment, in the next chapter; *still keeping in view, and having reference to, the subject he had been so long upon.*”

This verse teaches believers that we must be *ever watchful*. For we do not know the hour or the day. Yes, we must watch for the Lord's

second coming as it draws near. But also, we must watch for His coming for us *when we die* (Heb. 9:27)! For although we may not be alive at the time of His second coming, He comes for us when we die. And since we do not know the hour of our death (Gen. 27:2), we must always be watchful, knowing that each day could be our last (Jas. 4:13-15).

As for watching for His second coming: although we do not know the precise day nor the precise hour, the Word of the Lord reveals the *approximate* time of the Lord's return (the prophetic signs given in Scripture); and from these we are able to discern that it is drawing very near now. Therefore, Christians living in these times must carefully watch the signs, awaiting with eager anticipation the glorious return of their Lord and Saviour!

v.43: “*But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*”

The goodman of the house represents the Christian, and the thief represents the Lord Jesus Christ – for no other reason than that He will come *suddenly* and without warning, as a thief in the night breaks into a house.

Christ's spiritual coming in judgment upon the Jewish nation was sudden and unexpected to those careless, sinful Jews, living in pleasure, eating, drinking, giving in marriage, going about their daily tasks as if all was well. Likewise, His coming personally and physically at the end of the world will also be sudden and unexpected, like a thief in the night, to the people of the world.

But note well: His coming will be like a thief in the night *to the people of the world*. But to *true Christians*, His return should not be as a thief, catching them unawares!

In 1 Thess. 5:2, Paul, *writing to Christians*, says: “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night”; and Peter writes the same thing in 2 Pet. 3:10: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night”. Both apostles had in mind these words of the Lord Jesus in this verse. Yes, the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night – but to whom? To the people of the world – not to the true Christian! For Paul almost immediately goes on to write, just two verses later in 1 Thess. 5:4, “But ye, brethren, are not in

darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” The Christian is not in darkness, and therefore the day of the Lord’s return should not overtake *him* as a thief! True, he does not know the precise day nor hour of the Lord’s return; but he knows that his Lord *will* come; and for this reason he should always be watchful, and ready. The Christian is like a man who finds out somehow that a thief is coming to break into his house, and stays up and watches, so as to prevent him from doing it.

We may also understand, by these words of v.43, that as the true Christian is the “goodman of the house”, the householder, who is to take care of his “house”, he must take care of his *soul*, and the salvation of it, as well. For the Bible commands us regarding our heart, or soul: “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Prov. 4:23). And those who do not do so – those who are sleeping, and not ready, when He comes – will find that they will be lost for all eternity! Of course, the *true* Christian cannot lose his soul, and all of God’s elect will be saved; but this is written so that all who *profess* to be His may give diligence to make their calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10).

v.44: *“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”*

Oh, be ready! The Jews of the first century were to be ready for His spiritual coming in judgment on their nation; those who are alive as the world nears its end are to be ready for His personal coming on the last day; and in general, *all* people, at *any* time, need to be ready to meet Him when He summons them at death. For no man knows when he will die, and so it is imperative that we make peace with God through Christ now, so as to be always ready.

We do not know the precise time our Lord will return; but we do know it *will* occur! It is certain. For He has promised. And it will occur, as seen from the previous verses and also from v.50, when the people of the world do not expect it. We must be ready for what will happen, and we must be ready – prepared – to meet Him! We must be converted, our faith must be in Him alone, we must be prepared to die and be taken to heaven. Be prepared, be ready! “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness”! “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in

peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:11,14).

Let us see what the sister-passages in Mark and Luke have to say.

In Mk. 13:33 Jesus said, “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.” Christians must take heed! We must watch the signs of the times and take heed to them! And not only must we watch, but we must pray. But pray for what? Luke’s Gospel tells us, in Lk. 21:36: “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” As the destruction of Jerusalem drew near, the Jewish Christians were to pray to be spared what was coming upon the nation; as the end of the world draws near, we who are Christians are to pray to be preserved amidst all the upheavals of this time, and to escape the things that will come upon the earth; and in general all Christians, in all ages, are to pray to be ready to meet the Lord at any time, when He calls them home.

All Christians, in all ages, are to pray that they would be accounted worthy, by God’s grace, to eventually stand before the Son of man! But how? Well, every person who professes to be a disciple of Christ must make his calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10); make certain that he has called upon the Lord for salvation; and he must also pray for the grace to walk in the ways of the Lord. He must call upon Him daily for grace, strength, courage and deliverance. And one day, each one of His elect will be able to stand before Christ joyfully, dressed in His righteousness alone. “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 Jn. 2:28).



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

GOOD AND EVIL SERVANTS

MATTHEW 24:45-51

45. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

46. Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

47. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

48. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;

49. And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;

50. The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,

51. And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

v.45: *“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?”*

Who is this servant? He is the true Gospel minister! When Jesus taught the same thing on another occasion, He used the word “steward” instead of “servant” (Lk. 12:42); and the Scripture calls ministers of the Word “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1,2). They are called stewards or servants because they are in charge of their Lord’s household. And this is “the household of God” (Eph. 2:19); “the house of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15)!

The Church is His household, and Gospel ministers rule in the local churches, under Christ Himself (Heb. 13:7,17). This is why Jesus says of the Gospel minister, or pastor of the local church, “whom his *lord* hath made ruler of his household”. It is the Lord’s household, not any man’s; it belongs to Him; He alone is its Lord and Master; but He has made His faithful servants the rulers of His house, *under* Him.

Now if a man is made the “*ruler of the household*”, then he is required to be “faithful and wise”; as Jesus said: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant?”

First, he must be *faithful*. In 1 Cor. 4:2 Paul wrote, “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”; and in 1 Tim. 1:12 he wrote of himself, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry”. Indeed, none should ever be in the ministry except faithful men! Christ Himself was “faithful to him that appointed him” (Heb. 3:2); and it is required in His under-shepherds that they be faithful as well.

For the servant of Christ has been entrusted with a most important and precious thing, as Paul wrote to the young minister, Timothy: “That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (2 Tim. 1:14). And what is this good thing? It is the *office* of the ministry, and the *work* of the ministry! It is a good work, a vitally important work, a most wonderful work – and when the Lord commits it to any man, he must keep it by the Holy Ghost, and discharge his office faithfully and wisely.

Second, the minister of Christ must be *wise*. He must be “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15); he must be a converted man himself! And he must be wise in the ways of the Lord, wise in the Word of God, possessing not only knowledge of the Word, but the wisdom to teach it, and to apply it to various circumstances and situations.

What, then, is the “meat in due season”, which the steward is to give to the household? It is the Word of God! For the Word is compared with meat. In 1 Cor. 3:2 Paul writes, “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat”; and he means that he fed them with what Peter calls “the milk of the word” in 1 Pet. 2:2, as they were not able to bear the “strong meat” of the Word, spoken of in Heb. 5:12-14.

As “meat”, then, refers to the Word of God, “meat *in due season*” refers to the Word of God, faithfully and wisely preached by the Lord’s servant, each part being taught and expounded *at the right time*, and *according to the needs* of the members of the church under his care. For as it is with our physical diet, so with our spiritual: we do not eat only one thing, but we vary our diet, so as to provide the different nutrients which our body needs; and likewise with our spiritual “diet”. The pastor, being the shepherd of the flock, must be aware of the spiritual food which the members of the flock under his care need, and seek to provide this food accordingly. The meat of the Word must be “*rightly divided*” (see 2 Tim. 2:15), each member of the flock being fed what he or she is ready for. The Gospel minister is to be like a father, or like a servant in the house, who carves up the meat at the table, and gives to each member of the family what each stands in need of. What he gives to the babes is not the same as what he gives to the young men, or to the elderly. In the Lord’s household, the Church, there are “children”, “young men”, and “fathers” (1 Jn. 2:12-14). This means there are babes in Christ; there are those who have walked with the Lord a long time and are mature in the faith; and there are all those in between. And the wise father, or servant, will give to each his due portion: what each one needs at the proper time.

Prov. 25:11 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” A word fitly spoken is essentially the same as a word in due season! A minister may speak many words; but what is needed is fitly spoken words, words appropriate to the time and place, words which are most needed at any given time. Preaching is not just a matter of using many words, but they must be fitly spoken! We often speak of wholesome food, meaning food which is good for us. Well, we need wholesome words as well: “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing” (1 Tim. 6:3,4). Truly “wholesome words” (wholesome doctrines) are the doctrines of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are given to us in the Bible. It is giving “meat in due season” when the teacher of the Word provides the wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, at the right time and in the right measure, according to each one’s needs.

One other thing from v.45: the way the Lord worded it, by saying,

“*Who then is that faithful and wise servant?*” indicates to us that such faithful and wise servants are *few and far between*. He is truly “one among a thousand” (Job 33:23). The world is full of preachers, but very few, comparatively, are faithful and wise.

v.46: “*Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*”

That is, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find giving the household meat in due season.

The “coming” of the Lord Jesus, here, can in the first place refer to the death of the minister. For when he dies he meets the Lord.

In the second place, it can refer to His spiritual “coming” in judgment on the Jewish nation in AD 70.

And in the third place, it can refer to His second coming. And if that minister is found to have faithfully served his Lord, giving meat in due season to the flock under his care, blessed is he indeed!

He must be found “*doing*”. He is not to be slothful, nor to be careless in his labours. The Gospel minister must be constantly at his work; he must be diligent, hard-working, and faithful. He must “give” himself to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4)

And he must *persevere* in the work of the ministry right up to the end of his days, or right up until Christ returns – whichever comes first. “Take heed unto thyself,” Paul wrote to Timothy, the Lord’s minister, “and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16).

v.47: “*Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.*”

It is true indeed that in this world, as the Gospel minister faithfully serves his Lord, other things being equal the Lord will give him *more* to do for Him, making him even more useful in the house of the Lord, the Church, than he was before. But these words are specifically about the Lord giving His faithful servants great glory and happiness in heaven. Likewise, we read in Matt. 25:21: “His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” But what do the words mean? They are an allusion to the practice of the world’s great and mighty men, who often honour their

faithful servants by raising them to yet higher dignity, and entrusting them with even more; as Potiphar did to Joseph (Gen. 39:4,6). The Lord expressed Himself more straightforwardly on another occasion: “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour” (Jn. 12:26). The Lord will honour those who faithfully serve Him.

v.48: *“But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming”.*

Yes, there are evil servants! And they are many. But if they are evil, they are not truly converted; and if they are not, then why are they called servants at all? The reason is that, even though they are not truly converted, they have still managed to become ministers in churches. They *profess* to be Christ’s servants, and many men may assume that they are, for they may fool many; but they are not *truly* so. At heart, they are wicked. Here the Lord calls them what they profess to be, not what they truly are.

Now such men, being unconverted, in the first century came to the conclusion that Christ was not going to come in judgment on the Jewish nation – or at least not for a very long time. And today there are those who come to the conclusion that His coming for them at death is still a long way off; or that Christ is never actually coming again a second time – and thus they deny the biblical doctrine of the second coming, or, if they do not go so far as to deny it outright, they think that His coming is so far off that it is of no concern to them, and they do not have to be anxious about it.

Such a man, believing such things, believes that he does not have to give an account of his stewardship for a very long time, if ever. And this gives him a false sense of security to go on in his evil ways, fleecing the flock, making merchandise of them. As Peter says of these false teachers of the Word, “through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Pet. 2:3). In effect, when the Lord appears to such a man to be delaying His coming, he says, as the people of Israel said to Aaron when Moses delayed coming down from the mount, “we wot not what is become of him”, and therefore, “Up, make us gods” (Exod. 32:1,23) – they make idols of their own bellies, or the world, or money, or other such things.

As the verse says, such a man says such things “*in his heart*”! It is what he thinks. But the Lord sees into the very hearts of all men. Nothing is hidden from Him (Heb. 4:13). And a day of reckoning is coming.

v.49: “*and shall begin to smite his fellowservants*”.

This verse is most instructive, when rightly understood. Note that he does these things *because* he believes that Christ delays His coming. This is his motivation! He is a wicked man, a false “servant”, with no fear of God before his eyes, which is why he is able to behave this way.

But who are his “fellowservants”?

In general, they are the members of the local church over which he is the pastor, or members of various churches; and in particular, they are men who are *true* ministers of the Gospel. He smites them! But how does he do so?

As regards the members of the church over which he unfortunately has the oversight, he abuses them, using his authority as wicked Diotrefes did. Of that false minister John wrote as follows: “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrefes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church” (3 Jn. 9,10). Such a man acts as a lord over God’s heritage, throwing his weight around instead of serving the church as a true minister would, according to 1 Pet. 5:1-3. He ridicules the true doctrines of the faith, which the members of the church hold to; lays on their consciences things which the Lord never laid down in His Word – the mere commandments of men (Matt. 23:4); etc.

And as regards the true and faithful ministers of the Lord, this false servant persecutes them, in word and in deed. In word, by “smiting with the tongue” (Jer. 18:18); and in deed, by “smiting” them physically, imprisoning them (Jer. 20:1,2), or even killing them or having them killed! History is full of the records of what false “ministers” have done to the true ones through the centuries. The priests of Rome, more than any other wicked false “servants”, have done so – calling themselves the Lord’s servants, these evil men have smitten the true servants of the Lord. They have thrown them into prison, tortured them in all kinds of

hideous ways, burned them at the stake, drowned them, etc., etc. And others have done so as well, falsely claiming to be the servants of the Lord – including (for example) Anglican priests who persecuted the Lord’s servants in the past, Lutheran ministers who did so, etc.

Again let it be said: although *true* ministers and Christians are not, in truth, “fellowservants” with such wicked men, this is how the *world* views them. The world sees this as Christians persecuting Christians, even though this is not the case at all. It is the devil’s servants smiting the servants of the Lord!

v.49: “*and to eat and drink with the drunken*”.

Firstly, we may take these words to be referring to the wicked “servant” who is willing to eat and drink with the *physically* drunken. It speaks of the false minister who gives himself up to gluttony and drunkenness, in the company of such sinful men. Such a man is one of those who “serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly” (Rom. 16:18); “whose God is their belly” (Phil. 3:19). After all, those who will readily be “drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus”, as the servants of the Roman Papacy have been (Rev. 17:6), will have no qualms about being drunk on alcohol either. Such loose living has characterised multitudes within the Roman Catholic priesthood, as well as within other false religious institutions: men who love wine, spirits and beer; who love revellings and banquetings; who happily mix with the drunken, and party with them.

But secondly, we may take these words to be referring, in particular, to the wicked “servant” who is willing to eat and drink with the *spiritually* drunken. There were such men between the resurrection of Christ and AD 70: the Jewish religious leaders who persecuted the Christians; the false teachers among the churches who insisted on the believers keeping Moses’ law; and others who taught loose living and sinful practices, not to mention various false doctrines, etc.

But looking further than that short period of time, these words refer to the man who is comfortable to associate with those who are drunk on the “wine” of the Great Whore (Rev. 18:3). The Roman Catholic institution has made the nations of the earth spiritually drunk. They are intoxicated with her, cannot think straight, and fall headlong into her

clutches. And there are many, many men, *professing* (falsely) to be the servants of the Lord, who have been very willing to eat and drink with the spiritually drunken through the centuries!

It is what we see happening in the devilish *Ecumenical Movement*: supposedly “Protestant” and “Evangelical” ministers, deceived by the devil, who are quite at ease amongst the spiritually drunken, fellowshiping with them and encouraging others to do so as well. Men who are so spiritually drunk that they cannot discern between truth and error; between the true Church and the false; between true Christians and false ones. Men so spiritually drunk that they are ready and willing to throw aside all true doctrine, the Word of God itself, just to embrace those whom they call their “brethren” in the Papist religion, and in other false “churches” as well!

Those associated together in the satanically evil World Council of Churches are spiritually drunken, all eating and drinking together. And when Protestant ministers fellowship with Roman Catholic priests at so-called ministers’ fraternals, or when they flock to the Vatican to meet the pope of Rome, or when they call one another “brother”, or when they pray together and worship together – *this* is eating and drinking with the drunken!

Truly, we live in a day of abounding spiritual drunkenness. As we look around us, it seems that virtually no one knows the truth, virtually no one separates the precious from the vile (Jer. 15:19), virtually no one takes a stand against all this wickedness. The very men who claim to be the shepherds of the flocks are leading their flocks into the clutches of the Mother Harlot of Rome – and almost no one can see it.

But the Lord is not mocked! A day of reckoning is coming:

v.50: *“The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of”.*

Is Christ truly the Lord of such a wicked servant? He most certainly is. It is not that the man is a true Christian and is truly called into the ministry – by no means is this the case. But Christ is the Lord of such a wicked man, not in the sense of being his Lord and Saviour (for He is not so, in truth), but because He is his *Creator*; for as God the Creator, He is Lord over *all* mankind, both the saved and the lost, the regenerate and the unregenerate.

Also, Christ is Lord over such a man in the sense of being his Saviour *by profession*. This is what such a wicked man *claims* is the case, even though it is a false claim. He professes to be the Lord's servant, and thus out of his own mouth the Lord will judge him. He will say to him, in effect, "You have professed, you have claimed, to be My servant, and therefore I will judge you according to what you have professed to be." And when He does so, that evil servant will be found utterly wanting. He will be found, on that great Day of Judgment, to be a hypocrite, having been deceived himself, and having deceived others.

The Lord Jesus Christ came suddenly upon the Jewish nation in judgment in AD 70, and upon those false religious leaders. They were not looking for Him. They were unaware of the hour of their visitation.

And Christ comes suddenly upon evil men at the moment of their deaths. These wicked "hypocrites in Zion", these false ministers, will suddenly be taken to meet Him at death – and will find to their eternal cost that He did not, in fact, delay His coming as they had thought (v.48), but that He came for them at precisely the time appointed: "it is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. 9:27).

And also, the Lord Christ will come again, suddenly, on the last day. He *will* return! Although the wicked and false "servants" say in their hearts that the Lord delays His coming, He will come at the time appointed by the Father. And it will be when they do not look for Him or expect Him.

v.51: "*And shall cut him asunder*".

This means that his body and soul will be separated by his death. For at death, the body of the wicked goes to the grave and the soul goes to hell; the one a prey for worms, the other a prey for devils. He is parted asunder. Christ is his sovereign, and He will punish him eternally for his sin.

v.51: "*and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites*".

This means with the hypocrites in hell. For such a man is certainly a hypocrite: he says one thing and does another; he speaks with a forked tongue; he is nothing but a liar; and all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire that burns with brimstone (Rev. 21:8).

In Lk. 12:46, when the Lord Jesus taught the same thing as in Matt.

24:50,51, He used the word “unbelievers” instead of “hypocrites”; and how true this is. For those who profess to be Christ’s followers, but are not, will end up in the same place as those who are outright unbelievers, which is hell (Rev. 21:8). Those falsely claiming to be ministers are the greatest hypocrites of all. They live a lie, and they preach what they do not believe.

v.51: *“there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

This means in hell, as is clear from Matt. 13:41,42: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” That will be the final end of all these hypocrites, these unbelievers, these evil servants. And tragically it will be the final end of all who follow them as well.



CONCLUSION

A brief exposition of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, found in the sister-passage to Matthew 24 in Mark's Gospel, is a fitting conclusion to this book.

MARK 13:33-37

33. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.

34. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

35. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:

36. Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

37. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

In these five verses, Jesus commands His followers, four times, to watch.

First, in v.33 we are commanded to *watch and pray*. Watchfulness and prayer go hand in hand, as is seen, also, from Eph. 6:18: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints". Christians in the first century had to watch and pray, for they knew not exactly when the time of Jerusalem's destruction would occur. And Christians alive today, as the return of the Lord draws very near, are to watch and pray as well. They are to watch over their souls, lest they fall into temptation; to watch over their brethren in Christ; to watch, to guard, against false Christs and false prophets, against deception from any quarter; to watch the signs of the times; and to watch for the Lord's return.

Conclusion

Second, v.34 tells us that the Lord Jesus has been on a “far journey”, having returned to heaven, which is the “land that is very far off” (Isa. 33:17), the “far country” (Matt. 25:14). But His “house” (His true Church) has been left on earth to carry out the mission entrusted to it; His servants (Gospel ministers) have authority from Him to govern His Church according to His Word (Heb. 13:7,17; 1 Pet. 5:2), each man having his particular work to do; and each to also play the part of the porter, watching over themselves and over the flocks entrusted to their care, watching unto prayer, and watching for the Lord’s coming (Acts 20:28-31; 2 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 13:17).

Third, in v.35 there is, again, the commandment to watch; and the reason given is that Christ is returning, but we do not know when it will be, and must therefore be ever watchful, ever alert, as we await His coming (this was true for those awaiting His coming in judgment in the first century; it is true for all Christians as we await His coming for us at the moment of death; and it is true for Christians who are alive as the time of the second coming approaches). As the world is a globe, when Christ returns it will be daytime for some believers, night-time for others; evening for some, early morning for others.

Fourth, v.36 warns true Christians that they must not be sleeping when He returns. This means they must not be backslidden; nor apathetic; nor spiritually drowsy; nor negligent in their duties (Rom. 13:11; Eph. 5:14): they must be awake, alert, watchful, prayerful, ready for the Lord’s coming, ready to meet Him.

And fifth, in v. 37 there is, again, the commandment to watch. It is issued to *all* believers, not just to those disciples who first came to Jesus and asked Him the questions which led Him to deliver this prophecy (Matt. 24:1-3; Mk. 13:1-4; Lk. 21:7).

The Lord Jesus gave His people this great prophecy. It was not given to tickle the ears, nor to satisfy idle curiosity. It was given for very practical purposes! It was given so that Christians would be warned; take heed; watch and pray; understand the times, and the signs of the times, and act accordingly; and be ready to meet their Lord and Saviour when He comes. This was the use which the early Christians in Judea, in the first century AD, were to make of this prophecy; and this is the use which all Christians are to make of it. It was entirely fulfilled by the events connected with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70;

much of it is also fulfilled, antitypically, by events connected with the second coming of Christ at the end of the world; and for all Christians in all ages, it has so much to teach regarding how to live in this fallen world, in which iniquity abounds, religious deceivers abound, hatred for Christ's disciples abounds, persecution is experienced, and political and social turmoil occurs.

It also reveals that Jesus of Nazareth *is, indeed*, the Son of God, the Lord and Saviour, and the great Head of His true Church. He is worthy of all praise, glory, honour and worship. Dear reader, make certain that you have cast yourself upon Him for salvation from your sins. Truly, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is *none other name* under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). None other name indeed, but the "name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9): the name of Jesus. Son of God and Son of man; Lord and Saviour; sinless and perfect in every way; holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; and able to "save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25). Make certain that you have indeed come! For He is coming again to this world, not this time to save sinners, but to take those already saved to be with Him forever, and to judge the world in righteousness, separating the saved and the lost, the sheep and the goats. A day of terror and misery for every person outside of Christ, but a day of joy and triumph for every true child of God!

"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:44).



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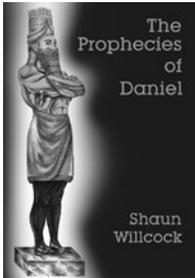
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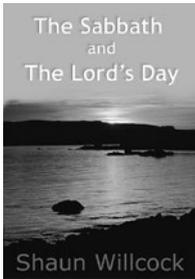


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There is a powerful and sinister institution at work in the world, claiming to be Christian but in reality antichristian, which is all the more deadly because it appears so beautiful and holy to so many. According to the Word of God, as well as the historical evidence

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This book demonstrates that the first day of the week, the Lord's day, is the day for corporate worship, but that *no day* is a *Sabbath* for New testament Christians. The seventh day Sabbath was abrogated along with the Old Covenant, and no other day was set up in its place; for the Sabbath typified Gospel rest in Christ, and with the institution of the New Covenant the Sabbath shadow gave way to the glorious reality.