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FR 225

A Look At Matthew 24; Part 1

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There are many topics that we can cover in this newsletter. There are some that I am sure many have been waiting for, such as the resurrection of the dead, the judgment and the 1000 years. These we shall cover in time. At this point, I thought a look at Matthew 24 would be beneficial, enabling us to see it as a chapter of continuity, as opposed to separate subjects. After all, this is one of the key chapters used to build the different systems of eschatology.

For the most part, I will only give the scriptural references, rather than a full quote, because of the lack of space. I trust that you will use your Bible and read as we go along. I will be pointing out quite a few Greek words and their meanings, some of which you may be aware of, while others may surprise you.

To get a good feel of the context, I ask that you begin with Matthew 21:23 and read through chapter 23. This will give a foundation for the continued discourse in chapter 24. When finished with this study, continue reading through chapter 25 and note that this whole sequence is one long discourse, beginning in the temple and ending on the Mount of Olives. I would also ask that you read Mark 13, Luke 17:20-37 and 21:5-36. Note the continuity of all of these passages. Ask yourself if there is one subject matter or two, one being near, and the other being separated by 2000 years.

You may note that I have covered certain parts in previous issues, but it never hurts to review these, helping to harmonize the scriptures.

In the chapters leading up to 24, Jesus spoke in parables showing the change in covenants that was soon to begin. He spoke of the judgment that would come upon the Jews. Jesus scathed the scribes and Pharisees for their wicked ways while pretending to be righteous. He told them to fill up the measure of sin of their fathers, and that all the righteous blood shed upon the earth would fall on them. He then told them their house would be left desolate and that all those things would come upon the generation that he was addressing.

1-3 Here Jesus makes it very clear that the temple complex would be completely destroyed. The destruction of the temple must have been nearly unbelievable to the disciples, and it piqued their interest. They wanted to know when these things would happen, and they wanted to know what the **sign** would be of his *parousia* and the end of the age. Now Jesus had not spoken of some distant judgment, but only of things to occur in that generation. The disciples understood that the end of the age was near. What

reason would they have had to think of any of these events occurring in the remote future? Jesus never so much as hinted to such an idea. They asked for a sign so they could know when his *parousia* and the end of the age would occur. With today's popular theology, a sign would be silly, because they claim the *parousia* will be obvious to every person on the planet. They claim no sign will be given and that it will happen without any warning for believers and nonbelievers alike. Yet the same people say the signs of the time are all around us.

4-13 Preliminary things to watch for. Notice in the Greek, in verse 6, the word **mello** is used. They were **about to** hear of wars and rumors of wars. They were not to be frightened by them, as this was not yet the end. Afflictions would come upon the believers. Who were the great persecutors? None other than the Jews. They were the great enemy. After many years of persecuting the believers, the Jews succeeded in getting the Romans to join in. Nero had many Christians put to death, but it was initiated by the Jews.

14 The gospel would be preached to the **world**, and then the end would come. In Matthew's account the word is **oikoumene** and means the Roman world. The same word is used in Luke 2:1 and shows the meaning of the word. In Mark 13:10 the word is **ethnos** and means nations, the same word that is often translated gentiles. Paul later said that the gospel had been preached to all the world (Col. 1:6, 23).

15-18 The abomination of desolation. Verse 15 is greatly misunderstood — even by preterists. Literally it reads, **“Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation, the thing spoken of by Daniel the prophet, having stood in the holy place let the reader comprehend, then the ones in Judea, let them flee to the mountains.”** This is telling the reader to recall what happened just prior to the Maccabean War, that was spoken of in the book of Daniel. This is not saying it is in itself a prediction of Daniel's, but rather a similar incident. They had seen this type of thing before when Antiochus Epiphanes profaned the temple. 1 Mac. 1:54 reads, **“...they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering.”** Then in 2:28 it reads, **“Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town.”** (Also see 2 Macc. chapters 6-7.) Jesus was telling them to flee from the horrors that would befall them if they remained. Luke does not use the term abomination of desolation. Why? Luke was writing to a gentile audience who would have been unfamiliar with the history of the Jews. Therefore he simply refers to this same event as armies surrounding Jerusalem. But the Jews would recall the events of the Maccabean revolt.

19-20 Jesus told them to pray that it would not be on a Sabbath. This is not pertaining to today, as there is no Sabbath except to the Jews who are not followers of Jesus. Jesus was speaking of his followers, who until AD70, did observe the Sabbath. If the law ended at the cross then he would have had no need to mention the Sabbath to his followers, because they would already be under the new covenant and out from under the Sabbath law. In other words, if the Sabbath was to end at the cross, his followers would have by that time, long abandoned the Sabbath, and thereby not be affected by it one way or another.

21-22 Then there would be great affliction to come upon those who were in Judea after the believers had fled. According to some translations, it was to be worse than anything since the beginning of the world and would never be again. First, the word “again” is not present in the Greek. Some translations do not add “again,” but others do. According to some translators, the word again is implied, or something similar. Myself, I have a very hard time trying to gain the true meaning of this passage from the Greek. We must be careful not to insert what is not truly implied. Secondly, what “world” is meant in this context? Is it the Jewish world, or the entire planet earth? The severity of the circumstances of the Jewish-Roman war is attested to by Josephus. It was brutal, inhuman, and a frenzy of death. This will be the topic of a future ER, as the details of this war are not commonly known.

Verse 22 is not in past tense in the Greek. The KJV is accurate in this case, “**And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.**” What do the elect have to do with the horrors within Jerusalem? Well, the Romans considered the Christians to be a sect of the Jews. Had God allowed, the Romans would have gone to all other areas to root out and kill the Christians. However this did not happen and was no doubt prevented by the hand of God. After all, the destruction of the Jews was by the hand of God, so why not the protection of the Christians as well?

23-26 More false christs were to appear on the scene and they were not go after them.

27 I have no satisfactory explanation for this verse. Different things have been suggested, but none to my satisfaction. Possibly it would **not** be something that needed to be announced, that when it came they would know and Christ would not be hidden in some wilderness or secret room.

Note that the word **astrape** does not always refer to lightning. In places like Revelation, it is always used in conjunction with thunder. But consider Luke 11:36 and it can be seen that this same word cannot possibly refer to lightning, but rather a lamp that puts out light. Matt. 28:3 is another instance where a bright light is most likely. How could this angel have the appearance of lightning? They would not have been able to look at it. Also the word **phainetai** does not necessarily mean flash, but shine, or give light. Shining from east to west is more in the line of the sun’s light rather than the phenomena of lightning. So the idea may not be lightning at all, but rather the light of day, which begins in the east and lights up even to the west.

28 Wherever the corpse is, there the eagles will gather. The word used for corpse is **ptoma** and means corpse or dead body. In Luke 17:37, the word used is **soma** and means body. The word used for eagles is **aetoi**. It means “eagles,” and the rendering “vultures” does not seem to be correct. We will have more on this in section **40-41**.

29 The sun and moon not giving light, stars falling from the sky, and the powers of heaven being shaken, are all references to the collapse of the Jewish theocratic system.

This would be the end of the old covenant with Israel. Look at Isaiah 13:10,13 noting the same language. This was a prophecy against Babylon (13:1). These things did not happen in a literal manner, or the earth would have been destroyed back then. Look at Isaiah 24:19-23 and see again the same language. This was a judgment against Tyre (23:1, 5, 8, 15, 17). See also Isaiah 34:10, Ez. 32:7-8, Micah 1:3-4, Nahum 1:1-6, Joel 2:10,30,31, Haggai 2:6. []

Because of the length of this discourse, it is being divided at this point even though this is not a logical division. Look for the second and final part next week.

This is copied from Greg's Eschatology Review, April 2004. We thank him for his great insights and for permission to reprint them. You may contact him at gjr@viclink.com .

(Cecil Hook; August 2004)