

INTO ALL THE WORLD

“And they (the angels) will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Matt 24:31). Was Jesus telling His disciples that, after the temple was destroyed, a new day of evangelizing the nations would begin? His message had been directed to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6; 15:24). After Christ’s death the message of the gospel would go to the farthest tribes. This was recognized by one, Caiaphas, the High Priest that year when he prophesied, “That Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, **and not only for the nation only** but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one” (John 11:51-53).

To support this interpretation the word “angels” must be translated “messengers” (Luke 9:52). “From the four winds,” means from the whole world. What was about to happen is described by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: “at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel (not the nation, but the Israel of God) and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been bought near through the blood of Christ (Eph 2:12-13).

On the Day of Pentecost, this is exactly what Peter said would happen. Peter told the crowd that God had sent the Savior to redeem all men. He told the crowd, “The promise is for you and your children (the Jews) and for all who are far off (the Gentile nations) – for all whom the Lord our God will call (you and me)” (Acts 2:39).

TALK ABOUT

1. Has God called all men and women to repent and be saved (Acts 16:30)? 2. Does God give every one a chance to be saved? 3. Jesus died to take away all your sins, past, present and future ___ True ___ False (John 1:29)? 4. Have you been saved from your sins (Acts 16:31)?

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The meaning of . . .

Matthew 24



Written in easy English

by Fred Morris

To the Reader: *Keep your Bible beside you. Read the Bible verses as you study. Most of the Bible verses are from the New International Version. You may have a King James Bible or another translation, so the words may be a little different, but the meaning will be the same. Ask God to guide your mind to know His truth. He has promised to do this for you (John 8:32).*

Ask a friend to join in the study with you. You may be able to help each other with something that you do not understand. Talk together about the questions. You will be blessed and so will your friend.

Preterism

Preterists were present in the early churches. They preached that Christ had already come the second time as He had promised (Acts 1:11). This teaching troubled the early believers who thought they had been left behind. And it trouble believers when it appeared again in Church of Christ circles in the 1950s. The Latin word means “past” or “gone by” This teaching was without foundation in Scripture at that time as it still is.

Paul wrote his letters to the Thessalonians to rebut this false teaching. He wrote, “According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord (the parousia) will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep (have died). For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven

- With a loud command....
- With the voice of the archangel
- With the trumpet call of God

and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive...will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess 4:15-17).

Paul tells the new believers how much he is longing for that Day of the Lord to come. He tells them plainly that they have been given the Holy Spirit as “a deposit guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Cor 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14; Phil 1:21,23).

JESUS LEFT THE TEMPLE

All day long Jesus taught the people who had gathered in the temple court. In Matthew 23 he records the seven woes that Jesus spoke to the hard-hearted Pharisees. They used the temple courts to buy and sell. Jesus was angry when he saw them using “His Father’s House” in this way and He drove them out of the temple courts. They often

carcass of an animal and the scavengers were the Roman vultures who took away all but its bones.

TALK ABOUT

1. Is “rapture” a Bible word? 2. What do people mean when they speak of “the Rapture”? 3. Will Christ’s second coming be noisy (1 Thess 4:16)? 4. Jesus said, “Keep watch!” (Matt 24:42). How should we do this? 5. Jesus will come “on the clouds,” but will He come to the earth?

SYMBOLS AND THE NATION OF ISRAEL

So Jesus tells the anxious disciples about this, the end of the covenant nation of Israel (Matt 24:29-31). He used the phrase, “Immediately after the distress of those days...” (Matt 24:29). Matthew has used the word “immediately” in the same way many times (NIV may use “at once” (3:16; 4:20; 8:3; 20:34).

We conclude that Jesus was speaking of the end of the religious and political system of Israel as a covenant nation. This is symbolized by the darkened sun and the stars falling from the sky (Gen 37:9-10; Rev 12:1).

The heavenly bodies shine forth the light we enjoy, just as Israel was to be God’s light bearer in the world. They are symbols of good times (Eccl 12:1-2).

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

It is not difficult to see in these verses a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ at the end of time (Matt 24:30-31), And many Bible students believe this is the correct interpretation. The changes that must take place may well be “the sign of the Son of Man.” The signs in the heavens will be universal. Every being will be alerted. The sun was darkened at Christ’s death (Matt 27:45). The glory that surrounds our Lord at His Second coming will outshine the sun, His brightness will be so much greater (Matt 17:2). And the dead will be awakened by the trumpet blast. The dust of the ages will be formed into resurrected bodies – some to be glorified with the Lord and others to judgment (Dan 12:2).

TALK ABOUT

1. Will there be only one resurrection? 2. Will it be silent? What three things will awaken the dead (1 Thess 4:16)? 3. Will every person see Jesus when He comes again (Rev 1:7)?

Then Peter responded, “the Lord is not slow in keeping His promise... He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish...” Peter goes on to speak of “the day of the Lord” and the end of the world (2 Peter 3:10-12). The two events are joined.

LIKE LIGHTNING

“For as the lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:27). The Second coming of Jesus Christ will not only be heard by all, it will be seen by all, both saint and sinner (John 5:24-25; Rev 1:7). When we remember that light travels at the speed of 186,000 miles a second, it is not difficult to understand how all men living at that time, could see, all at the same time, the splendor of Christ appearing in the clouds of heaven.

Lightning is a symbol of the Lord’s presence and power in judgment (2 Samuel 22:15; Ezek 1:13; 21:17). In the final judgment of the world “from the sky huge hail stones...fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail...because it was so terrible” (Rev 16:21).

But those who loved the Lord and had waited for His coming rejoiced. Some believe resurrected bodies will spring from the dust and gather to stand before our Lord some with swiftness and eagerness for they have eternal life, others will have nothing but eternal shame (Dan 12:2).

BIRDS OF PREY

“Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather” (Matt 24:28). There are a lot of similarities between what Jesus did and said and what was prophesied by Jeremiah. The disciples would have understood what Jesus meant by these words because Jeremiah had spoken them many years before and they were in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Because “a horrible and shocking thing had happened in the land” God would judge His people (Jer 5:28-31). Jeremiah wrote of the result: “Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air... and there will be no one to frighten them away” (Jer 7:33; 19:7).

The Jews worshipped the temple and its ritual rather than the God of the temple. The dead rituals of the empty temple were like the dead

confronted Him with hard questions. But Jesus answered them all. The Pharisees were only putting on a show, Jesus told the people. And He spoke seven woes against them and their teachings (Matthew 23).

Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate...” (Matt 23 37-38).

Jesus left the temple... never to return. He left the Pharisees with their greed and false teaching, He left them, with all their pomp and splendor.

HIS DISCIPLES WENT WITH HIM

The shadows were creeping up the walls of the Court of the Gentiles. A calm filled the air as Jesus rose, gathered His robe around Him and began to descend the stone steps leading away from the temple court.

Just then some of His disciples came to Him. The last of the sun’s rays bathed the temple in its golden light; the glory of the sun’s rays on the glistening gold and the polished brass dazzled them and made them exclaim “Look, Look!” They were impressed by the beauty of the great building. Herod had gilded the temple and made it even more beautiful than it was before, but Jesus had other thoughts.

Jesus saw what they saw, but He was not moved by the earthly things that filled their gaze. He was more concerned with their spirits and the true worship of their souls. He had said to Nicodemus, “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things” (John 3:12)?

“Do you see all these things?” Jesus asked the disciples, pointing to the Temple and all the buildings. “I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left upon another; every one will be thrown down” (Matt 24:2). The disciples did not speak. How could such a thing be?

Jesus walked ahead until they came to the Mount of Olives. He sat down there. The disciples sat down on the grass near to their Master. They were alone now.

“Tell us,” they said, edging closer to Him, “when will this happen (to the temple), and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age” (Matt 24:3)? They thought of these two events as being joined – the destruction of the temple and Christ coming to judge the nations. And they saw these two events as “the end of the age;” not

“the end of the world,” as in some translations. This meant a period of time that applied to Israel in Jesus’ day (Matt 15:24; Daniel 9:24-27).

TALK ABOUT

1. Where had Jesus been all day? 2. What had He been doing? 3. What caught the attention of the disciples and caused them to exclaim, “Look! Teacher.” (Mark 13:1)?

JESUS DID NOT ANSWER

Jesus did not answer their three questions:

1. When will the temple be broken down?
2. What will be the sign of Your coming?
3. What will be the sign of the end of the age?

Instead, He spoke to them of false teachers who would speak lies to deceive the people. Some would even declare themselves to be “the Christ” (Matt 24:5).

“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come” (Matt 24:6).

When Christ died on the cross, the Old Covenant of Moses became obsolete and passed away (Hebrews 8:13). A New Covenant took its place (Luke 22:20). It began “the age to come” (Matt 12:32). This age brought believing Jews and Gentiles into one fellowship by the blood of Jesus. This fellowship is called the Christian Church (Gal 3:28-29; Eph 2:14:18). Paul explained the significance of the things that happened to Israel when they left Egypt. He wrote, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment [end] of the ages had come” (1 Cor 10:11). Perhaps Paul refers to the end of the Old Covenant age and the beginning of the New Covenant.

Jesus had told the disciples that their generation of people, say those under 40 years of age, would surely see the destruction of the temple (Matt 23:36). At that time all animal sacrifices would be unnecessary. “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). The new way was for a final sacrifice that would take away sin for ever. Behold, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). All sacrifices were replaced by Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 8:2; 9:11,24).

The disciples were not to be distracted by the common signs or the deceit of those who would lead them astray. Many so called Messiahs

enabling every people group to hear the gospel in their own tongue before the final judgment.

And even then, by the time the temple was destroyed, the gospel was preached and heard by the then-known world (Acts 8:1-4).

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

There will be no silent rapture of the Christian church. Some teach that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will be in two stages or at two different times. First there will be “a silent rapture,” when the saints are caught away to heaven and sinners are left behind. At that time only the believers will see Him coming on the clouds!

One Bible expositor wrote, “(The rapture) will be a secret appearing (of Christ), and only the believers will know about it. His later coming will be ‘with the saints’ to rule on the earth for 1,000 years” (Roberts, “How to be Personally Prepared for the Second Coming of Christ). Jesus did not say this!

The time between Christ’s two comings is said to be “seven years,” taken from Daniel’s prophesy (Dan 9:24-26). In this interpretation, the prophesies of the Old Testament are so mixed together with New Testament teaching, that it is impossible to know the one without studying the other.

I believe Paul’s statement that “the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God...” (1 Thess 4:16) is enough to take away any thoughts of a silent rapture of saints only, before a time of great tribulation begins.

Right after Paul gave this word of encouragement to the Christians, he said Christ’s coming would be “like a thief in the night,” followed by the destruction of all who cry “peace and safety” (1 Thess 5:2-3). By “a thief in the night” Paul means Jesus would come when He was least expected.

TALK ABOUT

1. When we read “the last days” in Scripture, what are we to think of?
2. Some Bible scholars teach a rapture, before the Second Coming of Christ? Is there any reference to Christ coming silently?

PETER GIVES A TIME SEQUENCE

Peter gives the same sequence of thought in 2 Peter 3:1-15. He speaks of scoffers asking, “Where is this ‘coming’ He promised?”

After the Romans destroyed the temple, Christians in the provinces suffered untold atrocities under cruel emperors like Dominican and Nero, so that Luke wrote, "For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written... there will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and be taken as prisoners to all the nations (Luke 21:22).

According to Josephus, the Romans took over 100,000 Jewish captives to Egypt and sold them as slaves to the merchants of the world. Matthew and Luke are describing the same "great tribulation" and it happened in AD 70. But, Jesus said, "If those days had not been cut short, no one (Jew) would have survived..." (Matt 24:22).

FALSE CHRISTS

"False Christs and false prophets will appear and show great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible....do not believe it" (Matt 24:11; 23-24). Even Paul's reputation was tarnished by the accusation that he was "the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out into the desert" (Acts 21:38).

Jesus told the disciples these things "ahead of time," so that they would not be deceived by the false prophets. These false teachers told the people that all would be well and they should go up to the temple and wait for God to deliver them from the Romans (Josephus, the Wars of the Jews).

TALK ABOUT

1. Did the Christians in Jerusalem obey Christ's directions and flee from the city? 2. What happened to many Jews who stayed in the city and were captured by the Romans? 3. What rumor was spread about Paul (Acts 21:38)?

THE GOSPEL SHALL BE PREACHED

Jesus assured them and us: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14).

God's promise, made at the moment Adam sinned (Gen 3:15), would be fulfilled to the letter. The Redeemer had come and would die for the sins of the world (John 1:29). He was "the true light that gives light to every man..." (John 1:9). Every person born into this world has the 'light' of conscience. And God will heap His grace upon us by

would come and people would follow the false teaching. There was Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37) and many others. All of them came to nothing. There are many false 'messiahs' today.

TALK ABOUT

1. Jesus and the disciples went to the
2. The disciples asked Jesus three questions:
 - a).....
 - b).....
 - c).....?
3. What did Jesus tell them (Matt 24:2)?

JESUS SPOKE OF SIGNS

All prophecy pointed first to the Jewish nation and God's dealings with them. But Old Testament prophecy looked further to the gospel church and the coming Messiah. So what Christ said here looked to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Many believe it looked far beyond to the final judgment. Jesus warned them of what was to come.

Three times Jesus warned them of false prophets (Matt 24:11-24). Satan would appear to many as an angel of light, a false Savior. The people expected a Messiah and those who had rejected Jesus Christ were easily deceived (Luke 17:21).

Jesus said there would be wars and people would talk about wars; "kingdom will rise against kingdom," He said, and tribe against tribe. They would see this happening all around them. There would be fighting over the possession of lands, and precious resources.

Wicked leaders, poor methods of farming and the world economic crisis have led to famines in many lands today. Friends write from Zimbabwe:

"Last week I had two elderly people at the clinic. They said they hadn't eaten for five days; on Sunday a man asked Loveness if he could help plant her sweet potatoes for five bundles of vegetables, he has four children."

God sent a godly brother, Agabus, one of the Jerusalem elders, to the early church at Antioch. Agabus prophesied that "a severe famine would spread over all the Roman world. This happened during the reign of Emperor Claudius" (Acts 11:28).

And He said, there would be earthquakes in many places. All these signs, “were the beginning of birth pains” (Matt 24:8). When a woman is pregnant, before the child is born she starts having ‘birth pains’ these are the sign that the baby is coming. Those birth pains [signs] would come upon the ministers of the gospel. They would be persecuted for Christ’s sake. “And you will be hated by all nations because of Me,” Jesus said (Matt 24:9). The hatred and bitterness would even divide families. And all over the world the sons of Israel have suffered hatred and are persecuted to this day. But the true saints stand firm – it was not possible for Satan to deceive them (Matt 24:24).

Because of this persecution, many who appeared to have faith, would reject the Savior. But many others would “stand firm” and rejoice in their Lord. They would stand faithful “to the end” of this period of judgment (Ezek 7:2-3,6).

From the beginning of history, God had preserved a faithful remnant for Himself (Isaiah 11:11). There have always been a people who are faithful to God and they have not been idle. They have always told the good news of God and His plans for salvation to others across the then known inhabited world. One day every nation and people group will have heard their testimony. “And then the end will come,” Jesus said (Matt 24:13-14; Acts 17:6; Col 1:6).

TALK ABOUT

1. Tell some of the signs that Jesus said would come (Matt 24:4-8)?
2. Jesus said these signs were the of birth pains (Matt 24:8).
3. What would happen to those who preached the gospel?

THE ABOMINATION

The Old Testament has many references to things that were hated by God or an abomination in His eyes. Anything that turned people away from God to worship idols was an abomination to the Lord. Anything that broke the Law was an abomination, One of the best known was when some of the Israelites asked Aaron, Moses’ brother, to make a golden calf for them to worship (Exodus 32). Another was when Balaam, the false prophet, went to King Barak to curse the children of Israel. God turned Balaam’s words into a blessing. When sacred things were misused, this was an abomination to the Lord and was punished (v.15; Josh 7:16-26).

The abomination Jesus spoke of was mentioned in only one other place in the gospels (Luke 21:20-21). On both occasions Jesus used it as a warning sign to the Christians in Judea and Jerusalem. When the Christians saw this sign they must flee to the mountains to avoid the Roman armies.

Many Bible scholars associate this sign with the temple. But the people living in Judea would not have been able to see the temple or anything related to it. What they did see was the Roman army encamped around the holy city, displaying their heathen banners and their idols and making sacrifices to their gods.

Jesus said, “When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation (or destruction) is near. Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written” (Luke 21:20-21).

One may well wonder how people could flee from the city when it was surrounded by the Romans. During the siege, the Roman general Cestius Gallus suddenly retreated and left the way open for God’s people to escape. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, some went to the little town of Pella, one of the ten cities called “Decapolis” (Matt 4:25; Mark 7:31). Others escaped across the Jordan and hid in Transjordan.

Those Jews who did not heed Christ’s warning were killed by the Romans. The temple was completely destroyed and the city burned with fire. The heat caused the gold to melt and run down between the great stones, so that the soldiers literally pried the stones apart to get the gold “and not one stone was left upon another.”

TALK ABOUT

1. Name some things that were an abomination to God?
2. Did God punish the people who did these things?
3. What happened to the false prophet Balaam (Joshua 13:22)?

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Jesus said, “For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive...” (Matthew 24:21-22). This distress was to be in Judea and the only way to escape it had to be on foot. The Jews had committed a great crime – they had killed the Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:8; Acts 3:13-14; John 19:15).