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All material by the editor unless otherwise indicated.

MATTHEW Chapter 24

Matthew 24 is a chapter that has often been misunderstood. It has been used by false teachers to set forth various ideas and theories about the second coming of Christ. A "reign of Christ on earth" is supposed to be taught in this passage.

Both Mark (chapter 13) and Luke (chapter 21) record the same material Matthew does. The three chapters must be considered together to understand all Jesus taught. In this article our reference will be mainly to Matthew 24.

Christ was asked two questions. ((1) "When shall these things be?" "These things" in Mt. 24:3 refer to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem mentioned the verses 1-2. (2) "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Jesus answered these two questions in this order.

One needs to note that what Jesus said was **privately** unto his **disciples** on the Mt. of Olives. (Mt. 24:3) Therefore, one should not expect what was said to be applied to everybody upon the earth for all time to come.

Verses 4-8

Christ in these verses warns his **disciples** about being deceived. If they could be deceived, so can men today. The **disciples**, not men today, would hear of the wars and rumors of wars of that day, but they were not to be troubled for "the end is not yet"—the temple was not to be destroyed just then. Nations and kingdoms would arise against each other, but "these are the beginning of sorrows." Rome was at war with Syria, Samaria and others at this time before the destruction of Jerusalem. Famines, earthquakes and pestilences would be in different places. Earthquakes were in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hieropolis and Colosse. Read of famine in Acts 11:27-30. Verse 8 shows "all these are the **beginning** of sorrows" and not the **end** as it is usually contended by false teachers.

Verses 9-13

In these verses Christ shows there will be a time of suffering and persecution. The disciples would be hated, offended, betrayed, afflicted and killed for the Lord's cause (verses 9-10). False prophets would arise to deceive many (verse 11). The one who endured unto the "end" would be saved (verse 13).

Verse 14

Christ shows before the end of Jerusalem came the gospel was to be preached in all the world (see Mk. 16:15-20; Psm 19:4; Rom. 10:18). When the gospel is preached unto all the world, Christ

said, "then shall the end come"—the end of the Jewish state and the destruction of the temple.

Verses 15-26

When the "abomination of desolation" mentioned in verse 15 took place Christ gave certain instruction (see Dan. 9:23-27). The "abomination of desolation" of Daniel was the Roman army Luke tells us (Lk. 21:20). When this happens, **those in Judea** are to flee to the mountains (verse 16). This is not addressed to those in America. Those on the housetops were to flee. Woe or difficulty would be with those with child or small children (verse 19).

The disciples were to pray their fleeing to the mountains would not take place in winter when they would be cold nor on the sabbath when the city gates would be closed. Although the law of Moses was nailed to the cross, the Jewish authorities would have the gates to the city closed since the law was still the civil law of the land.

No flesh would be saved if the days had not been shortened. In the battle of Jerusalem, Josephus says about a million people were killed and that some of the fires were put out by the flowing of human blood. For the elect, the children of God, those days would be shortened.

In verses 23-26, Christ forewarns them of being deceived. Some would say Christ is at a certain place, and Christ said "believe it not" (verse 23). If they said Christ was in the desert or secret chambers the disciples were to believe it not (verse 24). Christ forewarned them (verse 25).

Verses 27-28

In these verses we have a second reference to the "abomination of desolation" spoken by Daniel. The "abomination" was the Roman army encamped at Jerusalem (Lk. 21:20). The Roman army encamped east of Jerusalem and came quickly toward the west in attacking Jerusalem is the significance of the first part of verse 27. The "coming of the Son of man" is the Lord's coming in judgement upon the Jewish nation and not his second coming. Verses 27 and 30 mention the coming of the Son of man, but chapter 26:64 shows the Son of man "coming in the clouds of heaven" and at the same time he is "sitting on the right hand of power." This is a coming in judgement. Since the Roman army was coming upon Jerusalem, the "carcase" of verse 27 was Jerusalem and the "eagles" were the army under the ensign of eagles.

Verses 29-31

Christ said after the tribulation "shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (verse 29).

Many have expected these things to happen to the literal sun, moon and stars. We understand Jesus did not mean the literal sun, moon and stars for the tribulation is passed and they are still in the heavens. The Holy Spirit through Isaiah used similar language in telling the downfall of Babylon. (Read Isaiah 13, noting verse 10). When the Holy Spirit moved Ezekiel to speak against "Pharaoh king of Egypt" He said, "And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light" (Ezek. 32:7-9). When the Holy Spirit used such language to describe the downfall of ancient Egypt

and Babylon, why should one not understand similar language of the Holy Spirit used to describe the fall of the Jewish State?

Concerning the "Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven" note the remarks on verses 27-28.

Verse 31 says what is said in verse 14, that is, the gospel is to be preached to all the earth before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Verses 32-35

Jesus gives them a parable of a fig tree. They knew summer was near when they saw the fig tree put forth leaves. Then Jesus says, "So likewise ye, when ye shall see **all these things**, know that it is near, even at the door" (verse 33). In verse 3 they wanted to know "when shall **these things** be." Jesus tells them in verse 33 they "shall see **all these things**."

Verses 33 and 34 are important to this discussion. If the disciples did not see "**all these things**" then these disciples are still alive on earth for Jesus said, "This generation shall not pass, till **all these things** be fulfilled" (Verse 34).

"Ye" —the disciples (Mt. 24:3; Mk. 13:3)—"shall see all these things." The "ye" does not refer to people living two thousand years in the future. "This generation" was the living generation at the time of Christ and his apostles—not a generation in the twentieth century. If "these things" have not been "fulfilled" then we have a whole generation living now who were living in the time of Christ. Since this is not true, "these things" were fulfilled then as Christ said they would be.

Concerning the kingdom, Jesus said, "verily I say unto you, That there be some of them stand here, which shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power" (Mk. 9:1). Either the kingdom has already come or there are men on earth alive who stood in the presence of Christ and heard him speak. Since all admit this is not so, we know the kingdom has come (see also Col. 1:13-14).

Jesus informed the disciples that his words would not pass away, but that heaven and earth, which was considered to be permanent, would pass away (verse 35).

Verses 33 and 34 show that what Jesus said in verses 4-35 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, the downfall of the Jewish State, and **NOT** to the end of the world.

End and Second Coming

In verse 3, the **second** question asked was "**What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the world?**" Jesus replies to that question by saying, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven but my Father only" (verse 36). In view of that which the "Father only" knows, it is interesting that the Adventists, Jehovah Witness, the Armstrongs and others "see" things which they say causes them to "know" when Jesus was or is coming.

Christ gives only one thing about the second coming of Christ that is certain—it is uncertain when he will come. He illustrates this with the uncertainty of the flood (verses 37-39); of two working in a field, (verse 40); and two women grinding at the mill, (verse 41). When ye "think not" it will then be when "the Son of man cometh!"

No Contradiction

If the things mentioned in verses 4-35 refer to the second coming of Christ, this would make Jesus contradict himself. From the signs Jesus mentions in verses 4-35 he said the disciples could "**KNOW** that it is near, even at the doors" (verse 33). Yet, in verse 42 he said, "ye **KNOW NOT** what hour your Lord doth come." The entire 24th chapter does not refer to the second coming for this would make Jesus say one time they could **KNOW** when it would be and then say later they **KNOW NOT** when it would be. This would make Christ contradict himself, which he did not.

When the Lord comes he will reward the righteous (verses 45-47) and punish the wicked (verses 48-51).

TWO CHURCHES – ONE ELDRSHIP

In the **Birmingham News** of Oct. 13, 1979, on page 22 of the section "Religion Today" is an article which tells about the Central Church in Birmingham getting the Riverchase Church of Christ started. About 25% of Central's members left and went south of Birmingham to form the new Riverchase Congregation. Central spent \$500,000 on the first phase of construction of the Riverchase building with two more phases yet to be built.

I have before me as I write this article a brochure about the Church of Christ in Riverchase. On page 3 of this six page brochure I read, "**You'll want to know about our autonomy. . . . The Riverchase work will be under the supervision of the Central Church of Christ Elders until such time it becomes self-supporting. At this point Elders and Deacons for the Riverchase congregation will be appointed.**"

Observe that the elders at Central will be over (1) the **Central Church** and (2) the **Riverchase Church**. Please observe that this is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. Would either the Central brethren or the Riverchase brethren care to give the book, chapter and verse for such an arrangement from the Bible? This is exactly what the Baptist practice when a Baptist Church starts a "mission" church. They oversee the "mission church" until it becomes self supporting. There is no difference between what Central and Riverchase are doing on this point and what the Baptist do. If there is a difference, will someone please point it out.

When one turns to the word of God, here is what is to be found. (1) There were "elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). A plurality of elders, but they were over a church, not over a plurality of churches. (2) Elders had the oversight of the flock over which the Holy Spirit made them over-

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