

MATTHEW CHAPTER 24

&

MARK 13:1-37 & LUKE 21:5-36

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

THIS LESSON, TAKEN FROM THE ABOVE REFERENCED SCRIPTURES IN MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE, IS NOT ABOUT THE VISIBLE, SECOND RETURN OF CHRIST; IT IS NOT ABOUT THE RESURRECTION AND TRANSLATION OF ALL OF GOD'S SAINTS UNTO THEIR ETERNAL REWARD.

IT IS ABOUT THE JUDGMENTS AND DESTRUCTION UPON JERUSALEM, THE TEMPLE AND THE JEWISH HEIRARCHY OF PRIESTS, COUNCILS, PHARISEES, SADUCEES AND AN UNBELIEVING POPULATION. IT WAS A DESTRUCTION WHICH OCCURRED IN 70 A.D., AFTER YEARS OF WAR AND BLOODSHED.

IN ADDITION, IT IS NOT ABOUT THE ENDING OF THE LAW, THE SACRIFICES, THE FEAST DAYS AND RELATED MOSAIC REQUIREMENTS. THESE WERE OFFICIALLY TERMINATED BY THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, INCLUDING THE ESTABLISHING OF THE CHURCH ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST AND THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL AGE.

THIS LESSON AND THE SCRIPTURES IDENTIFIED ABOVE IN MT. 24, MK. 13, AND LK. 21, PROVIDES THE ANSWER WHICH JESUS METICULOUSLY GAVE TO HIS DISCIPLES TO THE QUESTION THEY ASKED HIM WHICH WAS IN RESPONSE TO HIS STATEMENT THAT THE TEMPLE WOULD BE DESTROYED AND NOT ONE STONE WOULD BE LEFT UPON ANOTHER. THE ANSWER JESUS GAVE WAS MINUTELY DETAILED WITH A BROAD RANGE OF EXTRAORDINARY SIGNS, EVENTS, CATASTROPHES AND BRUTAL CONFLICT. HE DID NOT WANT THEM TO MISUNDERSTAND THIS EVENT.

MT. 24, ALONG WITH MK. 13 AND LK. 21, HAVE BEEN THE FOUNDATION AND BASIS FOR A GENERALLY ACCEPTED THEOLOGY ON THE FUTURE COMING OF JESUS AND THE CATAclysmic EVENTS THIS THEOLOGY CLAIMS WILL BE ATTENDED BY A TSUNAMI SUPPOSEDLY DESIGNED TO BE THE FORERUNNER OF THEIR INTERPRETATION OF THE SECOND RETURN OF CHRIST. NOTHING COULD BE FARTHER FROM THE TRUTH!

IT IS NOT SCRIPTURALLY POSSIBLE OR HISTORICALLY ACCURATE TO INTERPRET MATTHEW 24 AS A PORTRAYAL OF THE SECOND VISIBLE RETRUN OF JESUS, NEITHER IN THE FUTURE OR, AS SOME TEACH, IN 70 A.D. ALONG WITH THE RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS. TO DO SO IS A COLOSSAL DISTORTION OF STATEMENTS, FACTS AND AN ERRONEOUS AND DECEPTIVE ABUSE OF SCRIPTURE WHICH WILL NOT SUPPORT SUCH A POSITION.

AS WE LOOK INTO THESE SCRIPTURES, WE WILL FIND THAT THEY COMBINE TOGETHER TO GIVE A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF EVENTS WHICH OCCURRED AFTER THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH UP TO THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE BECAUSE OF BLATANT, ABOMINABLE UNBELIEF AND ALSO BECAUSE IT'S DAY HAD PASSED.

A BRIEF OUTLINE IDENTIFYING EVENTS & SIGNS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

EVENT	MATTHEW 24.	MARK 13	LUKE 21
DESCRIBE	VERSES	VERSES	VERSES
1. Jesus leaves the temple; disciples Show him the bldgs. of temple.	1	1	5
2. Not one stone will be left on another.	2	2	6
3. When shall these things be? What is the sign of thy coming?	3	4	7
4. Don't be deceived as many will.	4-5	5-6	8
5. Wars and rumors of wars	6	7	9
6. Famine, pestilence, earthquakes	7-8	8	11
7. You will be hated, afflicted, killed	9-12	9 & 11-13	12-19
8. This gospel must be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations.	14	10	N.M.
9. Daniel's abomination of desolation	15.	14	N.M.
10. When Jerusalem is compassed about	N.M.	N.M.	20
11. Time to flee to the mountains.	16-22	15-20	21-23
12. False Christ's and false prophets	23-26	21-23	N.M.
13. Where the carcass is, the eagles will be.	28	N.M.	N.M.
14. The sun, moon, stars, heavens shaken.	29	24-25	25-26
15. The Son of man coming in power/glory	30	26	27-28
16. Gathering of the elect together	31	27	N.M.
17. The sign of the fig tree	32-33	28-29	29-31
18. This generation shall not pass	34	30-31	32-33
19. Noah and the flood an example	36-41	N.M.	N.M.
20. Warnings to watch and be ready	42-51	32-37	34-36

INTRODUCTION

We have prepared a fairly comprehensive lesson outline regarding our convictions about the vitally important subject of the second, visible return of Christ. We have emphasized over and over that the express purpose of his return is twofold: (1) The resurrection and translation of the children of God from all ages, thereby providing them with their crown of eternal life he had promised. (2) The destruction of the world and works therein by fire, turning them into ashes.

In the course of that study, we were careful not to confine our position only to scriptures which obviously support our point of view, but have included scriptures and viewpoints contrary to our own. Anything other than this, on anyone's part, is unfair, incomplete and unacceptable.

When you consult the majority of theologians for their commentary on the subject of the return of Christ, they will invariably turn to the 24th chapter of Matthew for their answers. For some strange reason they will generally ignore and exclude scriptures which distinctly address the subject of the text and, instead, will base their conclusions on Mt. 24., at the risk of excluding other salient points from a large body of applicable scriptures specifically relating to the return of Christ.

Matthew 24 is a long chapter with many amazing predictions relating to a complex issue. That issue, as we have noted in our introductory comments, is not about the second return of Christ. That is not the subject of discussion in that chapter, nor the very extensive array of events predicted therein. The subject – the only subject – of this chapter which Christ reveals to his disciples, is the long siege, multiple wars, famines and pestilences and including the slaughter of over a million unbelieving Jews and, finally, the complete overthrow and utter destruction of Jerusalem, and the temple, thereby effecting the end of any form of organized governance, status, even the end of their proud dignity as a nation of people.

This chapter contains a large number of catastrophic events. Many of these events begin immediately following the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, his ascension and the founding of the church. Thus beginning in approximately A.D. 30, and continuing with escalating force and barbarity, until the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 66 – 67 A.D., and the ultimate final destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Due to the almost universal application of this chapter to the second return of Jesus and also due to its length and abundance of predicted circumstances leading up to its final fulfillment, I have decided to make my analysis of this chapter a separate document unto itself. It is not a chapter describing the second return of Jesus, even though it is widely applied to that event. It does not fit within the doctrine of the second return of Christ and therefore it is better suited to its own separate lesson. That will not prevent its study along with the study of the other lesson on the second return of Christ, if so desired. In addition, separating the two will keep from having such a voluminous document, with part of it inapplicable to the second return of Jesus.

ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW 24 – THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

The destruction of the ancient and revered city of Jerusalem, along with the total demolition of the sacred Hebrew temple, is a subject much broader than the final events of 70 A.D. In addition to that, it is also broader than all of the contributing events and signs as set out in this chapter. These events, herein predicted by Christ, had been set in motion by a long history of disobedience and rejection on the part of a majority of the Hebrew people, with the priests, scribes, Pharisees and others leading the way. Even the prophets of the O.T. had spoken of this day.

In the 23rd chapter of Matthew, where Christ leveled a scathing rebuke against the hypocrisy and unbelief of the Pharisees, that chapter ends with Jesus crying out with deep hurt because they had rejected him and his offer of salvation. In V38 he says: “Behold your house is left unto you desolate”. In V34 he tells them that he sent prophets and wise men and that they would kill, crucify and scourge them in their synagogues. Then, V35, he declares that all the righteous blood from Abel and forward would be required upon them. V36 leaves no doubt about the time of the fulfilling of this prediction Christ made: “Verily I say unto you ALL THESE THINGS SHALL COME UPON THIS GENERATION!” Since he was obviously talking to an adult audience, their “generation” would carry them only a few more years, thus making this prediction coincide with, or be in conjunction with that which will be described in chapter 24.

Jesus was in and out of Jerusalem during the last week before his crucifixion. The chief priests were constantly trying to trap and apprehend him. During his ministry Jesus encountered their deceit, rejection and attempts to kill him over and over. In these last days he predicts the utter desolation and destruction of their city, their temple and all they had, along with the utter desolation of them as a people. Matthew 24 is a detailed account of all that would come upon them by way of judgments for their total rejection of Jesus, the human manifestation of their God, Jehovah.

We believe it is unfortunate and wrong that the 24th chapter of Matthew and the events contained therein are interpreted as a discourse on the second return of Christ. We offer the following analysis of the chapter which we believe will show that it does not prophesy the second return of Christ, but rather, the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish polity.

It was about 4 days before the discussion of Mt. 24, Jesus had been in and out of Jerusalem, the temple and the immediate suburbs. He performed many miracles, avoided apprehension by the chief priests, preached among the people and, in chapter 23, had seriously criticized and condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and deceit. Now, just 2 days before his crucifixion, he leaves the temple area for the last time before his betrayal, apprehension and death.

V1. As they depart this sacred and storied place, the disciples come to him to show him all the buildings of the temple (as though he didn't know about the buildings and their history). In Luke's version of this same occasion, (21:5) he records that the disciples spoke of it as being adorned with goodly stones and gifts. Mk. 13:4 records essentially the same as Matthew.

While it appears that the disciples were speaking out of an appropriate respect and admiration for the temple, Jesus had a startling revelation for them regarding this highly revered place, where, of old time, God was said to meet with his people in the inner-sanctum of this hollowed precinct. (Note: Dr Clarke's commentary at this point records that the stones of the temple were 50 feet long, 24 feet broad and 16 feet deep. Absolutely stunning!

V2. Look at all these stones of the temple and their beauty. They will soon be destroyed and not one stone will be left upon another. That must have been difficult for them to comprehend. However, over 700 years before, Micah 3:12, declared that Zion would be plowed as a field, which thing, as Dr. Clarke, quoting from historian Josephus, literally came to pass in its destruction by the Romans. The disciples ears must have been ringing while their hearts and minds pounded with astonished wonderment at this startling declaration by Jesus. This beloved temple, the dwelling place of God, surrounded by the walls of the city of the great king, the residency of the oracles of the ages ---- would be leveled to the ground – like a field. How could this possibly be?

That was precisely the response of the disciples to Jesus when he made such a statement, which few, if any, of the dwellers of this sacred city would believe. Hadn't God protected and preserved this holy heritage through many centuries past? Would God forsake it now?

V3. The disciples came to him privately (at the Mount of Olives) asking Jesus ---- "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world be? Mark 13:4 records their question as follows: "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled"? Luke's version in 21:7 is: "When shall these things be? And what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass"?

Even though the specific wording of these three versions regarding the inquiry the disciples made of Jesus may vary slightly, the basic question is the same, reflecting anxiousness on their part to understand what Jesus meant. The difference is the perception and interpretation which popular theology imposes on this entire revelation Jesus unveils regarding the "coming destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and all other events leading up to it".

The question which the disciples asked of Jesus frames his complete response and detailed explanation relating to his disclosure that the temple would be utterly destroyed, not leaving one stone upon another. All three gospel accounts of the question have exactly the same objective: "What do you mean by this catastrophic prediction concerning the temple? When will this come to pass? What signs will manifest their coming destruction"?

It is vitally important to an understanding of this entire record of cataclysmic events, that we settle beforehand what the "subject at hand" is, and the frame and substance of the question which the disciples asked. (1) The subject as revealed in the response which Jesus gave concerning the great stones of the temple is that it would be utterly destroyed. The subject is not about the second return of Jesus and the resurrection, which is not mentioned throughout the entire discourse. (2) The question the disciples asked are not some random, unrelated inquiry about something Jesus did not mention. The question is: "when is this going to come to pass and what signs reveal it to us"? The

remainder of the entire disclosure of events, recorded in all three gospels, with virtually identical wording, is devoted to the answer to the questions of: "When will this come to pass and what will be the signs indicating its approaching calamity"? Any deviation from the stated subject and the answer to the questions related to it, will be a distortion of the facts, leaving you unable to reconcile such distortion to the scriptures of the entire story. To jump back and forth, from the subject of the destruction of Jerusalem to the future second return of Christ, is an unacceptable interpretation of the scriptures making this revelation by Christ. If we stick with the real subject and the real question, we will be guided to a reasonable and rewarding conclusion worthy of the scriptures.

Therefore, when will the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple take place and what signs will be the prelude to this event? Immediately following the question which the disciples asked of Jesus, in verse 4, Jesus proceeded with his answer to them. Even though the answer Jesus gives to their question is lengthy, complex and does not lend itself to a "surface interpretation", we cannot just imagine our own answer or reach a fair conclusion without the applicable history relating to the astounding prophecy Jesus makes. In other words, Jesus is foretelling future events, whether you interpret them as near at hand or far away; and the only answer to prophesy is history.

On page 2 we gave a brief identification of all the events described in Mt. 24, along with Mk. 13 and Lk.21. It is easy to see from the many events mentioned that most of them refer to some form of trouble. Even Christians were spoken of as being subjected to persecution and death. If, as we have stated, this chapter foretells the destruction (divine wrath is really what it is) of Jerusalem, the temple and a vast multitude of Jews, then their history from the time Jesus revealed these calamities until the actual destruction of the city and the temple should chronicle each and every one of them and thus verify their occurrence. We will investigate the pages of history for their validation. We will begin with an opening comment into these events as taken from the commentary of Dr. Adam Clarke as follows.

"This chapter contains a prediction of the utter destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the subversion of the whole political constitution of the Jews; and is one of the most valuable portions of the new covenant scriptures with respect to the evidence which it furnishes of the truth of Christianity. Everything which our Lord foretold should come on the temple, city, and people of the Jews, has been fulfilled in the most correct and astonishing manner; and witnessed by a writer who was present during the whole, who was himself a Jew, and is acknowledged to be an historian of indisputable veracity in all these transactions which concern the destruction of Jerusalem. Without having designed it, he has written a commentary on our Lord's words and shown how every tittle was punctually fulfilled though he knew nothing of the scriptures which contained this remarkable prophecy".

I am including a copy of Dr. Clarke's commentary on this chapter which you will find very helpful, with the exception of his comments on verse 34. We will say more on that later.

By way of contrast, I also have reproduced herein the opening statement from "Halley's Bible Handbook" on this chapter. You will find this comment unworthy of sacred scriptures.

Halley's on Mt. 24. "This discourse was delivered after Jesus had left the temple for the last time. It was about the destruction of Jerusalem, his coming, and the end of the world. Some of his words are so mixed up that it is difficult to know to which event they refer. Perhaps it was intentional". (Maybe it would help "un-mix" his words if Halley's would recognize there is only one event mentioned in this chapter).

It gets worse. The great theologian, C. S. Lewis, said that Mt. 24:34, "IS THE MOST EMBARRASSING VERSE IN THE BIBLE". I wonder what other words of our Lord "embarrass" this learned man.

Bob DeWaay wrote an article entitled: "A Solution To the Problem of "This Generation" in Mt. 24:34" In it he says, "all these things" did not take place during the lifetime of anyone then alive". So "all these things" means "some of these things" or some other solution must be found. Then he writes: "So I conclude that though "this generation" did include some of those who were living when Jesus spoke to them, it also includes those in the future who would make these rejecters of Messiah their "fathers" by doing likewise". Then he adds: "this generation" is not chronological but is a QUALITATIVE modifier that applies to Jewish resistance to God's message and messengers and that it is "trans-generational". I don't think that Mt.24:34 needs a solution; it only needs people to believe it.

Many commentators on Mt. 24:34 conclude that it means both the present generation and the generation when Jesus returns again. The Preterist "solution" to all of this is to conclude that Jesus actually returned in 70 A.D. and that the resurrection and translation occurred at that time.

As we have already described, V1 records the account of the disciples elaborating to Jesus about the great construction of the temple and its buildings. It truly was a magnificent structure, with all of its gold covering and architectural appointments. Josephus describes columns that were 25 cubits tall, made of one piece of white marble. It must have been magnificent to behold.

V2. Against this backdrop of amazing architectural beauty, Jesus abruptly states that it will all be completely torn down to the ground. What a contrast of the two opinions of this place; one by the Lord and one by the disciples. One focused on a magnificent structure and the other focused on its coming utter destruction.

V3. From this declaration by Jesus of its destruction, questions are raised in the minds of the disciples: when will this happen and what sign will forewarn of thy coming in such an awesome anticipation of destruction and the end of this world (or end of this era or age)? While it may be implied, yet the account in Mark and Luke does not mention the thought of the "end of the world". The "end of the world" reference here is about the end of the Jewish world or age which then existed but would be destroyed at and by the coming hand of God's judgment which his wrath would visit upon them. The word world used here is from the Greek "aion", meaning "age", whether short term or indefinite term. Here it signifies the end of the Jewish world or age. Otherwise it would be completely adverse to the content and context of the entire chapter.

V4-5. In these verses Jesus warns his disciples about being deceived by those who “come in his name, saying, I am Christ”. There always seems to be some in every dispensation that will seek to call attention to their self by claiming to be the one ordained of God for the time at hand. Many religions have been founded by such individuals. And, of course, they always claim to have the anointing of God upon them and their mission, along with cunningly devised demonstrations to prove it to the gullible. And, as Jesus predicted, there were those who, after his departure, thought it “divinely ordered” that they should be the messiah. Of course they were fakes, which just a small amount of comparison would identify. Even in the apostles days, there would be those who would seek to draw away disciples after them and would not heed the truth of the gospel.

V6-8. “And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of war”; “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”.

It has been calculated that there have been only a very few years since the beginning of time that there was no war, conflict, bloodshed and fighting. Mankind is more disposed to brutal conflict than they are to liberty and peace. The Lord predicted wars and rumors of wars as part of the prelude and sign of the ultimate conflict which brought about the destruction of Jerualem.

From these verses theologians conceive of a coming “third world war”, which they manipulate to be the forerunner of the second return of Christ, somewhere out in the future, and which they make an integral part of that second return. Since that view is a product of their imagination of future world-wide chaos, it can be dramatized by every conceivable element of human conflict and ruin, thus giving it a futuristic, end-time blood-letting, which endears itself to a religiously oriented catastrophe of world-wide proportions.

To be sure, there is always the possibility of world-wide war in the world we live in. However, that is not the subject of this chapter. The subject of this chapter, may I remind us again, is the coming judgments of total destruction upon Jerusalem and the temple. Therefore the wars and rumors of wars are not some disconnected, future conflict, which theologians find easy and dramatic for their philosophical book writing about being “left behind”, “restoring Jerusalem”, “rapture” and the like. I find it risky to trust predictions or prophecies of religious pundits, claiming knowledge of God’s future plans without scriptural verification for the same. Why not let the word of the Lord prophecy while we wait for history to fulfill it; or otherwise at least have indisputable proof of the claims.

“There shall be wars and rumors of wars” is very applicable to those events leading up to and connected with the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem. Today we often remark about the news coming out of the Mideast, Israel, Syria, Iran, Egypt, etc., and the never-ending hate, murder, fighting, terror, distrust and a completely elusive possibility of peace ---- ever. If you think that is awful, depressing, brutal and godless, then you need to read the history Josephus writes of the era we are studying – 30 A.D. to 70 A.D. – for the most insane, diabolical, cruel and heartless warfare imaginable. And he was an eyewitness to this. For over 250 pages of his book (each page the equivalent of 3 or more pages of a modern book) Josephus, as an eyewitness, describes the wars and the rumors of wars

so zealously and hate-inspired throughout the region, and of course involving the force and power of the Roman Empire which controlled Israel and adjacent countries.

The New Testament gives ample testimony of the bitterness and hatred which was always foaming and fomenting between the people of the land of Israel against the control of the Roman Empire, keeping in mind that the Jews were not only in Palestine, but were scattered throughout the Roman world. Thus it can literally be said that Jewish revolt and insurrection was a constant threat springing up from Jews of every quarter of the empire.

This element of insurrection on the part of the Jews was a growing political factor in the wars. They were "God's people" (they reasoned) and felt entitled to liberation from foreign rule. They never did see that God was both predicting and, in fact, providentially aiding in their ultimate overthrow due to ages of rejection of his word and Christ. They had God's temple, God's priests and God's law; surely, they reasoned, God would deliver them if they would but fight for their freedom. Never mind that they had blasphemed God's law, God's Son and God's temple and ---- their house was left unto them desolate.

So wars broke out – and spread – throughout all the villages, cities, suburbs and populace of all Jewry. It was not just Jerusalem; in fact that is where the last part of the wars ended. Before that, the Jews engaged the Romans in village after village; the Romans countered with attacks, siege, capture and destruction of city after city. Other nations and cities such as Syria, Damascus, Egypt, Italy, Rome and all between, by one faction or another, was drawn into conflict. Even Josephus himself was at first a leader among the Jews and on the side of their conflict, but later turned to the side of the Romans and tried to get his countrymen to lay down their arms, but to no avail.

The account Josephus gives of these "wars and rumors of wars", is too vast to transcribe here, but he names city after city, territory after territory, conflict after conflict in the section of his book entitled "Wars of The Jews". These wars covered an extended period of several years.

It was not just a war between the Jews and the Romans or between Jews and other countries around them. That would have been expected. The most horrible, egregious, inhumane, insane, bitter and murderous forms of these wars, were the battles they fought among themselves, right inside the city of Jerusalem. It is unbelievable, indescribable, the most blood-curdling and one of the most awful demonstrations of human conflict you will ever read about. Factions aligned with young vs. old, one leader opposite another, family against family, plot against merciless plot, house to house and street to street, with absolutely no humanity, status, character, nobility or poor, brother against brother and family against next door family which was spared during the outrageous fighting among themselves. They walked down the streets of Jerusalem, stepping on dead bodies that covered the ground. The valleys below were filled with the bodies of dead Jews. Indeed, the beastly greed, hate, horror raging among the Jews in Jerusalem was more of the cause of their ultimate destruction than the Roman army was. The "famines and pestilence" only aggravated and increased the slaughter among them. The prediction of Christ of "wars and rumors of wars" could not possibly be more completely fulfilled

than by the wars of the Jews with the Romans and among themselves, culminating in their utter destruction.

V9-10. They shall deliver you (the disciples of Christ) up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. Betrayal, hate and offenses will abound.

This hardly needs any explanation. If you have read the book of Acts, the epistles and even a little church history, you already know how persecuted the disciples were everywhere. First it was primarily from the Jews with bitter hatred of the gospel. The places where Paul established churches such as Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, etc., were places of bitter and unrelenting persecution against Christians, both by the Jews and then the Romans.

Nero became emperor of Rome about 54 A.D., and he soon turned to a monstrous beast toward the Christians. His reign was the beginning of Christians hiding in caves to worship; of the open air theatres and wild beast slaughtering of Christians. Peter and Paul both were slain in Rome near the end of his reign. Paul was beheaded about 67 A.D., which was about the time the siege of Jerusalem began. Stephen was stoned to death. James was martyred also. Matthew was killed in Ethiopia; Mark in Alexandria; Luke in Greece; Thomas in India, Simon Zelotes in Persia, etc. Nero even blamed the Christian for his infamous burning of Rome to divert attention from his own act.

There is no doubt that affliction, hatred, betrayal and murder followed the trail of the gospel wherever it was carried. This was truly another sign of the coming judgment on Jews and Jerusalem.

V11. And many false prophets shall arise and deceive many. Here again, if you follow Paul and his ministry, whose life and ministry filled the very time period we are considering, you will see that false Christ's, false preachers, etc. were at work everywhere the gospel went. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:29-30 that there would spring up from right among them those who would seek to draw away disciples after themselves. Through all the epistles and all history of this era, there were always those who were corrupters of the truth. Just one more sign of these times.

V12. Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. It is an interesting fact that Rev. 2:4, speaking of the very first church age conditions, the very time and age we are studying, God tells them they have left their first love. Paul spoke of those, like Demas, who had forsaken him, having loved this present world. When the fierce persecutions arose, such as sewing Christians in animal skins and tossing them to wild beasts for sport it is not hard to see why some would forsake their love for God and the gospel. When you read such epistles as I Corinthians or Galatians, the tone is one where Paul is seeking to avert divisions and a departure from the love of the gospel. It is like the parable of the sower where the word was choked out by the cares of this life, etc. The Jewish rulers and those who followed them, along with a pagan empire, there was very little toleration for Christ or his followers anywhere. Under such circumstances, many lost their first love.

V13. He that shall endure unto the end shall be saved. What end? The end of life; certainly; The end of the world and the second return of Christ; impossible. The end of the calamities predicted herein is

without a doubt the end to which this verse refers. The point of the verse is for them to be faithful even though there will be serious persecution which they will face during this time.

V14. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. Mk. 13:10 says: "And the gospel must first be published among all nations. Acts 1:8. Jesus told the disciples that "ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth". Mark. 16:15 declared; "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature".

There seems to be the idea that every living human being must have the gospel preached to them or this commandment is not fulfilled. Further this idea also embraces the notion that time has to last long enough so that the gospel can be preached to every living creature before Jesus can return.

If this is the proper interpretation of these verses, then it has already failed. Since Christ spoke these words there has been millions who have never heard the gospel. In addition, even today and forward, and with all of the electronic media available to us, some are just not going to hear, either out of circumstances or a refusal to do so.

What then shall we do with this command to carry the gospel to all the world? And, in order to conform it to our position that all these things are to occur before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., what fulfillment has there been of this requirement? That is a good question and there is a completely reasonable and biblical answer. To begin with, Mt. 24:14, requires that the gospel be preached to all the world "for a witness" to all nations. Did it really happen before 70 A.D.?

To find our answer we turn to where the gospel was first preached after the founding of the church in Acts chapter 2:5. "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, OUT OF EVERY NATION UNDER HEAVEN". When Peter preached the first gospel message of the church on the day of Pentecost, his audience consisted of Jews visiting from every nation under heaven. They heard the gospel of salvation that day and went back home as a witness of this grand story to "every nation under heaven". When they got back home they had an amazing story to tell

There is more in Col. 1:23. "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 UNDER HEAVEN; whereof I Paul am made a minister.

Next, follow the path of the gospel message. First in Jerusalem and surrounding area; next to Samaria; then to Paul at Damascus, followed by Peter's preaching to the Gentiles at Cesarea and you are beginning to see the commission of the Lord carried out. After this pick up the path of Paul who almost single-handed carried the gospel to the known world including his last stop at Rome. The Ethiopian eunuch carried the message of salvation to his country, where later Matthew was martyred. Mark went to Egypt; Luke to Greece, Thomas to India and Simon to Persia.

Take a step back and consider the story of the gospel as it has reached the remote corners of the world and the conclusion is easy: the message of God has gone to all the world for a witness to all

nations. Before Jerusalem was compassed about with armies and ere her walls and her temple were demolished, and even though it was in the midst of severe hardship and suffering, the gospel of the kingdom had been preached as a witness to the entire (Roman) world.

I should further note, that while it is with all evidence that this requirement of the gospel having to be preached into all the world was fulfilled before the destruction of Jerusalem, that does not minimize the importance and need for this and every generation of the church to carry this saving message to its own people. While it is impossible to reach every single creature of any generation due to a multitude of circumstances, we should always be trying. It is always an urgent and unfinished task.

V15. When ye see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel stand in the holy place ---- This reference to Daniel's prophecy is found in the 9th chapter. The cautionary comment Jesus made about being sure we understand what Daniel is saying comes from the fact that there are two different abominations spoken of in his book. That one in the 9th chapter is the only one which will fit in this narrative of Mt. 24. Dan. 9:26, speaks of the Messiah being cut off; and of the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with a flood and of the war desolations are determined. Dan. 9:27 adds that he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. Daniel speaks of other abominations in his book, but that spoken of in chapter 9 is about "his people".

It would be easy to attribute this desolation and abomination to the Roman army which ultimately overran Jerusalem and destroyed it completely. There is no doubt that they had their part in this catastrophe. However the real abomination to the city and the temple was imposed by the Jewish people in the city themselves led by their rulers. This was not simply their unbelief of Christ, though that was very real. Instead they committed ever atrocious act of desolation, sacrilege, blasphemy, brutal, horrible slaughter of innocents, complete desecration of the temple and every sacred purpose for which it stood. That was the real cause of its utter desolation and destruction.

Much of the underlying cause of this ultimate end was beginning to build early on, even before Christ. It only got worse from there until the Romans besieged the city about 66-67 A.D. Thereafter the horrific slaughter, famine, butcher-block-mentality, greed, terrorism and the most disgraceful desolation which a rabid, gross, desperate and completely evil-possessed soul could imagine was daily carried out. It was more from the inside from the scum of despotic humanity against their own people, family and children, day after day for about three years, until the Romans finally destroyed it all.

V16-21. There is a time when it will be urgent for him that is in Judea (not just Jerusalem) to flee to the mountains (for refuge). Why? Because, as verse 21 says, "then shall be great tribulation, such as has never been, nor ever shall be". This statement embraces a worse condition than history records anywhere. How could this possibly be? Would it be a greater tribulation than the Babylonian captivity? Would it be a greater tribulation than future desolations and despotic tyranny? If so, how? I have said that even the Jewish Holocaust by Hitler was not as bad as this, for one reason alone. The

despotism, terror, slaughter and the inability of the people to be allowed to escape the city and flee to the Romans (a thing the Romans offered more than once through Josephus), or to flee to some other place of refuge, along with the famine and merciless death of hundreds of thousands of people within Jerusalem, is primarily owing to a few mercenaries and their brutal control of every moment inside the walls. That is to say, the reason there is no greater known tribulation than this is because it was the will and the act of Jews upon Jews. If anyone even showed a desire to depart from the city, they were killed by their own kindred blood. Women and children had their last morsel of food snatched from their mouths by brute beasts. They walked down their streets, literally paved with the dead bodies of their own, the awful odor of death notwithstanding. And there was more than one faction, each fighting against the other, plotting, scheming, killing their own blood kin and neighbors. Nothing could have been any worse. They were the victims of every vile spirit which a completely deranged human soul was capable of imagining and could brutally carry out.

V22. We are told that unless those days should be “shortened”, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.

The idea of “the days of this great tribulation being shortened” is not easy to place. We could simply take it as a matter of fact that it would occur because God said it would and simply leave it at that. We don’t have to know the details of this shortening of days. On the other hand, it is injected into the narrative so as to make it appear of very distinct and meaningful importance and not just an insignificant side note of minimal interest. The wording suggests that without this “shortening” the “elect” would not have been spared.

When was this shortening of days? How long was it? Did it impact the people inside the walls of Jerusalem or elsewhere? Does this shortening mean a reduction of the number of days of the war with the Romans? Does it mean an opportunity somewhere in the process of the war with the Romans for the elect to escape, or must it be attached to the actual end of the war at which time there was nothing left but utter destruction, people included?

It hardly seems practical to assert that a certain number of days were cut from the end of the war, such as instead of it lasting 3 years and 8 months, it was shortened to just 3 years. That, as it turned out, would not have spared anyone. When the war finally ended and Titus walked through the rubbish of the city, nothing was spared. Further, at its end there were no Christians in the whole city to flee from it.

On the other hand, if we look at this concept of “shortening of days” as an interlude or time, during the process of the war when the days of exposure of Christians within the city to the actual battle which was daily escalating, we can, indeed, find a time when, for any Christian thus exposed that would be a means of escape for them. Even this might not have given an opportunity to flee the city due to the fact that anyone attempting to do so would have been slain by one of the mercenary gangs which controlled every possible exit.

In Luke’s account of these events, in ch. 21:20, there is a signal which anyone who was paying attention to the description Jesus had given, years before, would have known to “run for their lives”.

Luke records, “when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies (that is, when the siege begins) then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. This verse is followed by admonition to flee to the mountains, and them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them which are in the countries enter therein.

Note: If these chapters (Mt. 24, Mk. 13, Lk. 21) were about the second coming of the Lord, there would be no admonition to flee to the mountains for safety; their safety would have been in his coming. Likewise in Mt. 24:16-21, these precautions for self-preservation would not have been necessary. But Jerusalem and Judea were about to be destroyed and therefore it was necessary to flee from the “wrath to come”.

V23-26. False Christ’s and false prophets shall arise seeking to draw away disciples after them. Their cunning will be so subtle and the urgent sense of a need of deliverance (from the siege) that it is enough to deceive even the most dedicated and watchful. But these events aren’t going to be secretive. As brightly and as obvious as the lightening filling the sky from the east to the west, so also will all these calamities be. So don’t be led astray by false prophets offering peace, security and even divine deliverance from the destruction of which I have told you. Remember, not one stone will be left upon another. Jerusalem will not be spared and its desolation is near. (It would have been difficult for even the disciples of Christ to comprehend and accept as inevitable fact, the utter destruction of their beloved city and sacred temple. Was God going to forsake this place and this temple, or worse, would divine providence hasten and abet its demise?)

V29. 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.

First we must realize that these surreal events in the heavens are given as a symbolic means of describing a catastrophic set of events. These events are wars, famines, pestilences, slaughter, great tribulation and unbelievable and indescribable atrocities taking place during the siege and destruction. To those who have never read a detailed account of the three years of the destruction of Jerusalem, you have no benchmark to gauge the horrifying conditions which attended it. To those who have studied it, you have no problem seeing it in the signs of a darkened sun and moon, stars falling and the whole heavens shaken. That is because you can see in the impending destruction of Jerusalem, the Hebrew heavens, the sun of their glory and the stars of their history, all crashing down.

Dr. Clarke writes: “The word “immediately” shows that our Lord is not speaking of a distant event, but something on hand as a consequence of wars already predicted. And that leads to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the very subject which Jesus set out to describe to the disciples. The Jewish heaven shall perish, and the sun and moon of its glory and happiness shall be darkened – and shut down completely.

In Isaiah Chapter 13, there is a description of the coming judgments upon Babylon. Reproduced here are verses 1, 6, 9, 10, 13 and 19. Notice the language illustrating the utter destruction of that once-great city and how similar that language is to that which is in Mt. 24 regarding the destruction of Jerusalem.

“1. The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see. 6. Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. 9. Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. 10. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. 13. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. 19. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah”.

V30. And then – when the sun and moon are darkened, the stars fall and the powers of the heavens are shaken ---- that is, when the fate of the city is sealed with Roman armies compassing it about – then shall appear the SIGN of the Son of man in heaven. It is not – the Son of man shall appear, but the SIGN that it is he that is ordering this divine judgment on Jerusalem.

Dr. Clarke’s commentary here is this: “The plain meaning of this is, that the destruction of Jerusalem will be such a remarkable instance of DIVINE vengeance, such a signal manifestation of Christ’s power and glory that all the Jewish tribes (scattered over the empire) shall mourn.

V30, cont’d. “And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”.

At this point let us be reminded of the “subject” of the scriptures in Mt. 24, as expressed in the first three verses of the chapter. That subject is the destruction of the temple so that not one stone is left upon another. The rest of the chapter is related to that subject and the explanation Jesus gave of it. To deviate from that subject, or to try and make two lessons of these scriptures, one for their present time and one for a future time, will not comply with the narrative requirements within the text.

Notwithstanding that, this 30th verse does state that they shall see the Son of man coming in clouds of heaven with power and great glory. In addition to verse 30, verses 3, 27, and 37 also make a reference to “a coming” of the Son of man. The question to be answered is, what coming? The Bible often speaks of the Lord’s coming in various times, ways and reasons.

In Mt. 16:27, for example, it says: “For the Son of man shall “come” in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he reward every man according to his works”. I am sure that orthodox theology would interpret this verse to refer to the second visible return of Christ at the end of all time. But the very next verse (16:28) destroys that theology completely when it says: “There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. You may apply these verses any way you will, but the language of verse 28 confines this “coming”, whatever it is, to the time frame of the life time of those hearing him speak these words.

Mk. 9:1. In this verse Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, that shall not taste of death, until they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. Again, this is an obvious reference to the establishing of the church on the day of Pentecost, while some or all of them were still alive.

The correct application is in the expression of V28 – “coming in his kingdom”. He came and filled his kingdom, dominion, the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), which was during the life time of those who heard him speak those words. Accordingly, Jn. 14:15-21, describes Jesus as coming as the “comforter” in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Mk. 14:60-62, there is another reference to the “coming” of Jesus in power and glory which fits within the description we have given above. In these scriptures, Jesus is on trial before the chief priest who asked Jesus if he had any answer for the accusations made against him. But Jesus just held his peace and did not say anything. Again the high priest asked him if he was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed.

Jesus said, “I am: and ye shall see the Son of man setting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven”.

There is no practical way to interpret and apply this answer Christ gave other than that of the founding of his kingdom – the church – on the day of Pentecost. Not to recognize the coming of Christ in his kingdom, with power and great glory, on that memorable, earth changing day of the mighty out pouring of the Holy Spirit – about 50 days after his resurrection – is to miss the glory and power of the very beginning of the kingdom of God among men and the salvation it would offer.

Indeed, Jesus came in great power and glory at Pentecost – and beyond. The beginning of the church, the beginning of the gospel commission to the entire world, the beginning of the new day, a new message with a new life, was attended by the “COMING OF JESUS IN POWER AND GREAT GLORY” upon the church. Jesus came to it, filled it and led it forth into the world by the power of his presence in his Holy Spirit. He did not come in his visible flesh, but through the power of the Holy Spirit as he worked through the church for the advancement of his gospel kingdom.

Several years later (as Mt. 24 describes) he came in power and glory in the midst of the catastrophe and destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and the Jewish national polity, was not just a war among opposing enemies. It was a divine act of God’s judgment upon an unbelieving nation which had been predicted of long time past, which had rejected and crucified the Lord of glory.

This is the “COMING” which was spoken of in Matthew 24.

Earlier we quoted Isaiah 13, where he described the “coming of the day of the Lord”, in destructive power upon the nation of Babylon. In other examples, the Lord came in the destruction by the flood; in fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the judgment upon Judah by way of the Babylonian captivity, just as he also came to deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt.

There is nothing mentioned in this “Mt. 24:30 coming of the Son of man” which speaks of the phenomenal events of that “second return of Christ”, such as the resurrection, translation and the destruction of the world by fire. Instead the coming of Mt. 24:30, depends upon and relates to “wars and rumors of wars”, “Jerusalem compassed about with armies”, “fleeing to the mountains”, “great

tribulation”, “shortening of those days”, “false Christ’s” and other “signs of the Son of man” – as the setting for this coming. The descriptions of all the events of Mt.24 will fit the history of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans which was completed in 70 A.D. They will not fit the biblical description of the second return of Christ, such as is given in I Thess. 4, I Cor. 15, and II Pet. 3. Jesus did not visibly return in 70 A.D.; there was no resurrection or translation then; the world was not consumed by fire then. On the other hand, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and all the signs and calamities of this chapter did occur by or before A.D. 70.

V32-33. Now learn a parable of the fig tree. When you see a fig tree beginning to put forth leaves, it is a sure sign that summer is nearby and will soon, inevitably come. With that one simple, but reliable analogy, Jesus uses the sign of the fig tree putting out fresh leaves to convey a point about the subject he has had so many things to say and predict.

Likewise, Jesus says, just as you can know that summer is fast approaching when the fig tree puts out its tender leaves, so also, when you see all “these things”, know that it is near, even at the door. “These things” is a reference to all the signs of wars, false Christ’s, tribulations, etc., which he has been telling them about. “These things” are the object of the analogy of the budding fig tree. As the budding fig tree signals the nearness of summer, so the transpiring of “these things” will signal to the disciples that the day is nearby when “not one stone will be left upon another” of the temple. That is the entire purpose of the “fig tree” story, to help with the correlation between all “these things” and the approaching ruin and destruction of the Jewish state.

Unfortunately, much of orthodox theology interprets the “fig tree” as a sign of something else which is not once mentioned in Mt. 24, and is completely foreign to the content thereof. Many interpret this budding of the fig tree and the approaching summer as representative of what they call the “budding of the nation of Israel”. The restoring of the nation of Israel as a sovereign state in 1948 has absolutely nothing to do with either the budding of the fig tree or all that is predicted in Mt. 24. This chapter is not about a “restored Israel” but a desolate and destroyed Israel. If Mt. 24 is the main basis for orthodox teachings on the restoration of Israel, then they have no basis. It is not profound wisdom which draws an irrational conclusion from scriptures which do not mention the idea or have any component of the theory of a restored Israel buried anywhere in its text. The analogy of a fig tree budding has no connection to any future restoring of Israel. Of course, the real agenda for assuming this conclusion is that it serves as a basis for a still further “spiritual” restoration of Israel and that is supposed to be a signal for the simultaneous coming of Christ the second time to set up some form of earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. The very idea is preposterous.

The next verse (34) which we now come to is the controlling and key verse for interpreting and applying everything in Mt. 24. Every other statement or prediction in this chapter must come through the prism of this one verse. It reads as follows:

“ VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS, TILL ALL THESE THINGS BE FULFILLED”.

This verse controls the destiny, meaning and application of every single “sign” Jesus so meticulously covered in Mt. 24.

“THIS GENERATION” unequivocally means those living at that time. “All these things” reaches back throughout the entire chapter, encompassing everything Jesus predicted in answer to the question which the disciples raised in verse three. You cannot choose which predictions you want to bring under the boundaries clearly set by “this generation”.

“This generation” is a reference which is set out in several other scripture locations which we have reproduced below to emphasize the application and limitations imposed by such expressions.

Mt. 23:36. “Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation”. After delivering a scathing rebuke of the Pharisees in Mt. 23, he describes how judgments shall befall them for the accumulation of their sins. Then Jesus sets the boundary for the fulfillment of these judgments as “this generation”.

Mt. 16:28. “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”. Beginning in verse 21 of this chapter, Jesus was showing his disciples how that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer and be killed and then rise again on the third day. This is followed with Jesus describing that all who will follow him must take up his cross, denying himself. This is a reference of the establishing of the kingdom of God among men and would take place before some of them standing there (hearing him speak) would taste of death. Verse 27 describes the Son of man coming in his glory with his angels and bringing his reward with him. The reward he refers to is salvation which these Jews could obtain by denying themselves, taking up their cross and following him. If it was a reference to the eternal age, he would not speak of them taking up a cross and following him. Then he gives the time frame for this setting up of his kingdom with its rewards: “some of those standing there would not die before this had come to pass”. It is clearly a passage referring to the establishing of the church based upon his death, burial and resurrection.

Mk. 13:30. “Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done”. This is Mark’s account of the same events as Mt. 24. His record confirms that “all these things” would occur within the generation then living.

Lk. 21:32. “Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled”. Luke gives the exact same testimony of “this generation” and the fulfillment of “these things” therein.

Lk. 9:22-23, 26-27. ---- “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day. And he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. -- For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of his holy angels. – But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God”. This is another confirmation of the Lord “coming in his glory” and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels, which is a reference to the establishing of the kingdom of God ---- the church. In testimony of the absolute fulfillment of the boundary imposed by “this generation”, “not tasting of death”, the disciples, all but Judas, were living witnesses of the establishing of God’s kingdom on the day of Pentecost. In addition some were also still living when Jerusalem fell to the Romans.

Notwithstanding the boundary of “this generation” built around the events predicted in Mt. 24, beyond which those events have no extension, cunning craftiness still resorts to meaningless subterfuge in order to push them out into the future. They seek to do this by at least 2 manipulations.

(1) Some say that when you read “this generation” in Mt. 24:34, that it is a moving target. That is, as every new generation comes along, they are to read “this generation” as referring to their own. In this manner as they interpret the prophecy of this chapter, they determine that “this generation” ultimately applies to the second coming of Christ. I don’t know if this came from the seminary where they studied for their doctor of divinity degree, or if they just imagined it; in either case it is wrong.

(2) The other way to avoid the obvious meaning of “this generation” is to change its meaning entirely. Instead of it meaning a specified era or time of existence, they change it to mean a “certain race of people”. Thus the words of Christ in Mt. 24:34, et al, about “this generation” are changed to refer to a “certain race of people. By this completely illogical, unscriptural and incongruous definition, they can proclaim in their commentaries and from their pulpits that the expression is a reference to the “Jewish race of People”. With this deception they can assert as being eternal truth the posit that the Jewish race of people will be living when Jesus returns, thereby (they believe) they can bridge this impossible boundary and extend “all these things” into their future agenda. It just won’t work!

“THIS GENERATION” means just that: “THIS GENERATION”. And when it says that this generation shall not pass till “all these things” be fulfilled, it leaves no room for any agenda presumed to be beyond the life span of those living when the words were spoken by Christ.

V36-39. The Lord explains to the disciples that the day and hour of these extraordinary and catastrophic events will not be known by all. To describe this absence of knowledge of “these things”, he uses the days of Noah as an example. With Noah building the ark right before their eyes, yet because of their wicked imaginations and unbelief in God, they were caught in complete unpreparedness for the flood. But Noah knew; God had told him how many years it would be for the remainder of that wicked age.

Likewise when the “wars and rumors of wars”; “armies compassing Jerusalem”; “famine, pestilences” and “false Christ’s”, etc., came to pass, those faithful to Christ knew it was time to flee to the mountains ---- and they did.

There is an argument offered by the guile of some, that “this generation” applies to the faithful disciples, while “the hour cometh which no man knoweth” applies part of the Mt. 24 text to the future. It is the theory, held by many, that the events of this chapter has two parts: one applicable to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and the other applicable to the future return of Christ. “All these things” are restricted to the era of “this generation”, which was to those living at that time when Jesus spoke the words of these coming events; the destruction of Jerusalem.

V40-41, provides a scene wherein a distinct separation is made between people “working in the field or at the mill” It describes a 50/50 split between them. Orthodox theology will use this as a description of their “secret rapture”, when, supposedly, God’s children are “caught up to heaven” out of this world, and others are left plowing and grinding. Since that is not what the verses say, without

a lot of presumptuous unreasonableness, and since the chapter is not about the end of the world, and since the ones left “plowing and grinding” would set off a world-wide news phenomenon, the best advice is to ignore this fallacy of a “secret rapture”, and leave that to the agenda of the admitted fictional “Left Behind” imaginary dramas. The analogy of Noah and the flood gives us all the explanation we need for these verses, and that is why the Lord used it. Some were spared by the ark; others were destroyed in the flood.

In the destruction of Jerusalem it is a recorded historical fact that no Christians perished in the siege and destruction of the city. Titus continually offered to allow that people could escape the city, even having Josephus on several occasions to plead with them to stop the fighting. On at least one occasion, Titus, for reasons not explained, withdrew from the siege for a period of 4 or 5 days. The point is that there were opportunities for any Christians in the city to flee. They had been forewarned by Christ by many signs that were not all that hard to read when they occurred.

V42-51. These verses contain an exhortation and warning for the disciples to beware, be prepared, be watchful and don't let the awful scenes and events and destruction coming upon the Jews and Jerusalem catch them in its awesome finality.

Even though the temple and Jerusalem were revered in the hearts of every Hebrew; even though it was there that Christ was crucified and resurrected; and it was there the church was established and sent forward to the world; it was there the gospel was first heralded -- and no doubt, in spite of the insane persecutions rendered by the Jewish hierarchy against believers in Christ, there were Christians there still at the time when the wars first began and Roman armies laid siege to the city. It was their home and their heritage also and they were surely depressed with their city facing destruction and, moreover, their own personal dwellings would be taken from them and ultimately destroyed.

No doubt some of them in the city, as the Roman siege began, had their personal dwellings far from Jerusalem, yet they still had a personal, historical investment in the “city of God”. We have commented earlier that 1,100,000 Jews were ultimately slain in the three or more years of the war: many by the Romans and many by their own civil fighting. The city of Jerusalem itself did not have that much of a population. The siege went through the annual feast of Passover and unleavened bread and other feasts, more than once during all of this time. Jews from “every nation under heaven” came to Jerusalem on these great feast days. Josephus says that Titus let them into the city with them having the idea he would also let them out. Not a chance. Thus the thousands slain in the city ultimately amounted to much more than its own regular population.

Perhaps no event in all the storied history of Jerusalem sparked as much emotion as this one did. These emotions drew them fervently and ferociously into the war. They were sure – and they had plenty of false Christ's and false prophets to tell them so – that God would deliver them from the armies and intent of the entire Roman Empire. It was not to be. Years of disobedience and sin and idolatry were too deep. Many prophets had been sent to them which they had slain. When the great Husbandman sent his Son, they took him and crucified him, while they cried out to Pilate, “let his blood be on us and our children”. Their house was left unto them desolate; the die was cast, the

handwriting was on the wall. When at last Titus walked through the rubbish of the city he exclaimed: "I never could have accomplished this without the help of God".

"These things" had all come to pass and there were some of the generation to whom Christ had revealed this awful event which were still living. In a moment of reflection they must have said ---- the Lord said it would be thus!

SUMMARY

The destruction of Jerusalem, the beloved city of the Hebrew nation, along with the complete demolition of the sacred temple, all of which held such unforgettable memories, is one of the saddest stories of history. This is true not only because of its immediate impact but also for its implication for the future of this, once so great a people. Their political existence is destroyed; their national identity is, for all practical purposes, dissolved; their once great and sacred law, first of all disobeyed and made inviolate by their sin and idolatry, now has no sacred shrine and, for that matter, no acceptance

as a governing institution in the world; homes and families destroyed or scattered to the four winds, not to mention the thousands of them which had been slain in the ensuing wars.

Their succeeding history would not be a victorious one. Even today, when every fair minded person would accord them the rights and privileges of their once-beloved city, yet they find themselves ever surrounded with such hostilities that no nation should have to live under. I am not saying that today's hostile circumstances are a continuation of the judgments of God from the past; that I do not know. I would wish them well among the community of nations of the world. Insofar as their relationship with God is concerned today, they have exactly the same chance to come back to God (only) through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as any other person can do. No more and no less.

The astounding declaration of Jesus to the disciples that the temple would be destroyed to the point that not one stone would be left upon another, evoked an equally astonished response from his disciples. When will this be; what will signify when it will come to pass. From that question Jesus set out to carefully detail the many and almost unbelievable events that would lead up to and include his ominous prediction.

There would be deception, false Christ's, false prophets, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilence armies surrounding Jerusalem, the destruction of their own mercenary brutes and finally, the destruction of the towers, walls and ultimately the temple. It had been the wish and orders of Titus to spare the temple, perhaps as a trophy of his triumph. However the battle was so fierce when his troops actually entered the city that the emotions of his own soldiers were out of control. They set fire to the temple and it was consumed. It was demolished, stone by stone, leaving what today is known as the "wailing wall".

The sign of the fig tree putting forth its earliest buds as a sign that summer was nigh, was an analogy that typified that the coming to pass of all these things, with the Roman armies in lock-down mode around the city, was the sign that its destruction was nigh.

The entire Hebrew world, "heavens", even their sunlight of hope in their God, their utter collapse from within their own ranks, along with their own brutal, insane destruction of so many of their own people, had to signal to any sensible observer that it was all over: Jerusalem and the temple, the priesthood, their feast days, everything was in utter ruin.

It was August, 70 A.D. Paul and Peter had been martyred under Nero about 65 – 67 A.D. Other disciples were still living who had been present in the days of Christ; John was one, but there were more. Maybe in one way it was good that Paul and Peter, great leaders in the movement of Christianity, were not still living: it would have broken their hearts even more to see such utter devastation, not only of personal lives but also of the ruin of not accepting the Christ, their own offspring. Maybe that was why, at least in part, that in Romans 9:1-5 and 10:1, Paul lamented the cut off condition of Israel, wishing that he himself were accursed for his Hebrew brethren. The book of Romans was written later in his ministry and some of the real signs of trouble could have been showing themselves. He surely knew of the predicted destruction to come and there is a sense of urgency in the tone of his writing for them. Jesus had come unto his own and his own received him

not. As a result, their “house” was left unto them desolate and his blood was upon them and their children.

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ADENDUM TO "MATTHEW CHAPTER 24"

There will be from time to time thoughts and relative information which is expressly applicable to the conclusions expressed in this lesson on Mt. 24, Mk. 13 and Lk. 21. This addendum section will offer a separate place to describe such information. Thus it can be a growing document as necessary to include any addition deemed important to this lesson.

On pages 18 and 19 of this lesson is our explanation of Mt. 24:34, regarding "THIS GENERATION" and how the requirement of this verse absolutely controls the time element of the entire chapter and all of the signs and predictions contained therein. There are many other verses of scripture which can add to this explanation and confirmation of the fact that "this generation" expressly binds the time element to those living at that time, some or all of which would still be living when all of the events of the chapter had come to pass. It will reinforce the conclusion we gave if we provide a greater number of those scriptures with their specific application of the expression "THIS GENERATION". Following is a list of those scripture references. There may be some duplications here.

Mt. 11:16. "But whereunto shall I liken THIS GENERATION? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows", ---- Jesus is describing the unstable behavior of those among whom he lived.

Mt. 12:41. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with THIS GENERATION, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here". The generation in which he lived will be condemned by the status of the people of ancient Nineveh.

Mt. 12:42. "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with THIS GENERATION, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here". This has the same application as the previous verse and shows that "this generation" to whom Christ spake, were more deserving of judgment than the queen of the south (Sheba).

Mt. 12:45. "Then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto THIS WICKED GENERATION". This is a specific expression applicable to those living then to whom Christ spoke these words.

Mt. 23:36. "Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon THIS GENERATION". After a scathing rebuke for the hypocrisy of the Pharisees of that day and time, Jesus tells them that "all these things" would come upon "this generation" There is no correct application to make of this verse but unto those to whom Jesus was speaking in that day.

Mk. 8:12. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, why doth THIS GENERATION seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation". Two times in this verse he addresses "this generation" as the one which is seeking a sign of him being the Messiah.

Mk. 8:38. “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in **THIS ADULTEROUS AND SINFUL GENERATION**; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels”. Every Bible scholar would interpret the words “this adulterous and sinful generation” as being the very generation to whom Jesus was speaking.

Lk. 7:31. “And the Lord said, where unto then shall I liken the men of **THIS GENERATION**? And to what are they like”? What possible application can these words have other than those who were living then?

Lk. 9:41. “And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse **GENERATION**, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring thy son hither”. Jesus is saying I am, present tense, with a faithless and perverse generation of people.

Lki. 11:30. “For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to **THIS GENERATION**”. To what generation was the Son of man a sign like Jonas, except the one then living?

Lk. 16:8. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of **THIS WORLD** are in their **GENERATION** wiser than the children of light. This is another reference to those people living at that time.

Lk. 17:25. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of **THIS GENERATION**”. In which generation did Jesus suffer? The only answer is, in the generation living when he was crucified.

Acts 2:40. “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying save yourselves from **THIS UNTOWARD GENERATION**”. Which generation could the people to whom Peter was speaking save themselves except from the one in which they were living?

In order to achieve a definite comparison with the above cited 15 verses, we will reproduce below the verses whose interpretation is in question. This will aid in the confirmation that “**THIS GENERATION**” refers to exactly that: “**THIS GENERATION**”, and not to some future generation concocted only to suit a religious agenda.

Mt. 24:34. “Verily I say unto you, **THIS GENERATION** shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled”.

Mk. 13:30. Verily I say unto you, that **THIS GENERATION** shall not pass, till these things be done”.

Lk. 21:32. Verily I say unto you, **THIS GENERATION** shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled”.

SELECTED COMMENTARY BY DR. ADAM CLARKE ON MATTHEW 24

Dr. Adam Clarke in his commentary on the great events foretold in Matthew chapter 24, provides some strong support for the same application which we have made of those events. With a few exceptions his commentary validates those which we have given. Let me share some of his comments here from his notes on chapter 24.

He begins: *“This chapter contains a prediction of the utter destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the subversion of the whole political constitution of the Jews; and is one of the most valuable portions of the new covenant scriptures, with respect to the evidence which it furnishes of the truth of Christianity. Everything which our Lord foretold should come on the temple, city, and people of the Jews, has been fulfilled in the most correct and astonishing manner; and witnessed by a writer who was present during the whole, who was himself a Jew, and is acknowledged to be an historian of indisputable veracity in all these transactions which concern the destruction of Jerusalem. Withoju having designed it, he has written a commentary on our Lord’s words, and shown how every tittle was punctually fulfilled, though he knew nothing of the scriptures which contained this remarkable prophecy”.*

“Josephus says, Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the whole city and temple, except three towers and a part of the western wall, and these were spared; but for all the rest of the wall, it was laid so completely even with the ground by those who dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make them that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. Maimonides, a Jewish rabbin says, that the very foundation of the temple was dugged up, according to the Roman custom. His words are these: On that nineth day of the month Ab, fatal for vengeance, the wicked Turnus Rufus, of the children of Edom, plowed up the temple and the places round about it, that the saying might be fulfilled, Zion shall be plowed as a field.

THE SIGN OF FALSE CHRIST’S. *Josephus says, that there were many who, pretending to divine inspiration, deceived the people, leading out numbers of them to the desert, pretending that God would there show them the signs of liberty, meaning redemption from the Roman power; and that an Egyptian false prophet led 30,000 men into the desert, who were almost all cut off by Felix. Under the reign of Nero, while Fexix was procurator of Judea, impostors of this stamp were so frequent that some were taken and killed almost every day.*

THE SIGN OF WARS AND NATIONS AGAINST NATIONS. *Nation shall rise against nation portended the dissensions, insurrections, and mutual slaughter of the Jews and those of other nations who dwelt in the same cities together, particularly at Ceasarea, where the Jews and Syrians contended about the right of the city, which ended there in the total expulsion of the Jews, above 20,000 of whom were slain. The whole Jewish nation being exasperated at this, flew to arms, and burnt and plundered the neighboring cities and villages of the Syrians, making an immense slaughter of the people. The Syrians, in return, destroyed not a less number of the Jews. At Alexandria the Jews and heathens fought, and 50,000 of the former were slain. The people of Damascus conspired against the Jews of the city, and, assaulting them unarmed, killed 10,000 of them.*

THE SIGN OF EARTHQUAKES OR POPULAR COMMOTIONS. *If we take the word earthquake from its original sense, then it means particularly those popular commotions and insurrections which have already been noted; and this, I think to be the true meaning of the word: but if we confine it to earthquakes, there were several in those times to which our Lord refers; particularly one at Crete in the reign of Claudius, one at Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos. One at Rome, mentioned by Tacitus; and one at Laodicea in the reign of Nero, in which the city was overthrown, as were likewise Hierapolis and Colosse. Add to all of these, a dreadful one in Judea, mentioned by Josephus accompanied by a dreadful tempest, violent winds, vehement showers and continual lightening and thunder which led many to believe that these things portended some uncommon calamity.*

FEARFUL PORTENTS. *Luke says of this (Lk. 21:11) there shall be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. Josephus, in his preface to the Jewish war, enumerates these. A star hung over the city like a sword and a comet continued a whole year. The people being assembled at the feast of unleavened bread, at the ninth hour of the night, a great light shown above the altar and the temple, and this continued for half an hour. At the same feast, a cow led to sacrifice brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple. The eastern gate of the temple, which was of solid brass, and very heavy, and could hardly be shut by twenty men, and was fastened by strong bars and bolts, was seen at the sixth hour of the night to open of its own accord. Before sun setting there was seen over all the country, chariots and armies fighting in the clouds, and besieging cities. At the feast of Pentecost, when the priests were going into the inner temple by night, to attend their service, they heard first a motion and noise, and then a voice, as of a multitude, saying, let us depart hence. What Josephus reckons one of the most terrible signs of all was, that one Jesus, a country fellow, four years before the war began and when the city was in peace and plenty, came to the feast of tabernacles, and ran crying up and down the streets, day and night; A voice from the east! A voice from the west! A voice from the four winds! A voice against Jerusalem and the temple! A voice against the bridegrooms and the brides! And a voice against all the people! Though the magistrates endeavored by stripes and torture to restrain him, yet he still cried with a mournful voice, Woe, woe to Jerusalem. (Note: The only testimony of this that I know of is from Josephus. I cannot otherwise support or condemn such sights. I leave it to my readers to choose as they will. Taken along with all the other calamities and given the magnitude of the prophecy of signs you cannot arbitrarily discount them.)*

IN ALL THE WORLD. *Perhaps no more is meant here than the Roman empire; for it is beyond controversy that Luke 2:1, means no more than the whole Roman empire; as a decree for taxation or enrolment from Augustus Caesar could have no influence but in the Roman dominions. As early as the reign of Nero, the Christians were grown so numerous at Rome as to excite the jealousy of the government; and in other parts they were in proportion. However, we are under no necessity to restrain the phrase to the Roman empire, as, previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, the gospel was not only preached in the lesser Asia, and Greece, and Italy, the greatest theatres of action then in the world; but was likewise propagated as far north as Scythia; as far south as Ethiopia; as far east as Parthia and India; and as far west as Spain and Britain.*

THEN SHALL THE END COME. *When this general publication of the gospel shall have taken place, then a period shall be put to the whole Jewish economy, by the utter destruction of their city and temple.*

THEN SHALL BE GREAT TRIBULATION. No history can furnish us with a parallel to the calamities and miseries of the Jews: rapine, murder, famine, and pestilence within: fire and sword and all the horrors of war, without. Our Lord wept at the fore-sight of these calamities; and it is almost impossible for any human person to read the relation of them in Josephus without weeping also. St. Luke, 21:22, calls these the days of vengeance, that all things which were written might be fulfilled. These were the days in which all the calamities predicted by Moses, Joel, Daniel and other prophets, as well as those predicted by our Savior, met in one common center and were fulfilled in the most terrible manner on that generation.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TRIBULATIONJ. Commentators generally understand this, and what follows, of the end of the world and Christ's coming to judgment: but the word immediately shows that our Lord is not speaking of any distant event, but of something immediately consequent on calamities already predicted: and that must be the destruction of Jerusalem. The Jewish heaven shall perish and the sun and moon of its glory and happiness shall be darkened – brought to nothing.

Clarke has much more to say about the predicted events of this chapter, but these will certainly give us a sense of his overall understanding of them. Let me add that, in one particular and very important verse, V34, Clarke tries to project "this generation" into the future by changing "generation" to "race of people". In my opinion that simply will not fit the requirement of the text.

"THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH"

The following is taken from "The History of The Church" written by EUSEBIUS (A.D. 263 – 339). He is recognized as the father of ecclesiastical history. He was an intimate friend of Emperor Constantine. He also was Bishop of Caesaerea. His record of the wars, famines and starvation of 1,100,000 Jews, largely at the hands of brute mercenaries from among their own people, portrays an event unlike any other in the history of mankind. Two facts alone warrants the description of these events as the worst, most diabolical and heart-rending ever. Those two facts are: 1. The fact that the majority of the slaughter and brutal destruction of hundreds of thousands of Jews was at the hands of their own people within the walls of Jerusalem itself. 2. The other fact is that, in the depth of the famine and starvation, there is evidence that they ate their own children. Nothing else in all history compares with this.

His record depends largely upon the works of Josephus who was an eye witness to the atrocities and destruction that befell the Jews and Jerusalem. You will find these comments to be spell-binding and heart-rending. You will also find that they provide a very precise fulfillment of the predictions which our Lord Jesus made concerning them.

When Nero had been master of the empire for thirteen years, the business of Galba and Otho occupied a year and a half; and then Vespasian, after his dazzling success in the campaigns against the Jews, was proclaimed emperor while still in Judea, after being hailed as Imperator by the armies there. He at once set out for Rome, entrusting the war against the Jews to his son Titus.

After the ascension of our Savior, the Jews had followed up their crime against him by devising plot after plot against his disciples. First they stoned Stephen to death; then James the son of Zebedee and brother of John was beheaded; and finally James, the first after our Savior's ascension to be raised to the bishop's throne there, lost his life in the way described, while the remaining apostles, in constant danger from murderous plots, were driven out of Judea. But to teach their message they travelled into every land in the power of Christ, who had said to them: "Go and make disciples of all nations in my name". Furthermore, the members of the Jerusalem church, by means of an oracle given by revelation to acceptable persons there, were ordered to leave the city before the war began and settle in a town in Perea called Pella. To Pella those who believed in Christ migrated from Jerusalem; and as if holy men had utterly abandoned the royal metropolis of the Jews and the entire Jewish land, the judgment of God at last overtook them for their abominable crimes against Christ and his apostles, completely blotting out that wicked generation from among men.

The calamities which at that time overwhelmed the whole nation in every part of the world; the process by which the inhabitants of Judea were driven to the limits of disaster; the thousands and thousands of men of every age who together with women and children perished by the sword, by starvation, and by countless other forms of death; the number of Jewish cities besieged and the horrors they endured – especially the terrible and worse than terrible sights that met the eyes of those who sought refuge in Jerusalem itself as an impregnable fortress; the character of the whole war and the detailed events at all its stages; the last scene of all when the abomination of desolation announced by the prophets was set up in the very temple of God, once world-renowned, when it underwent utter destruction and final dissolution by fire – all this anyone who wishes can gather in precise detail from the pages of Josephus' history. I must draw particular attention to his statement that the people who flocked together from all Judea at the time of Passover Feast and – to use his own words – were shut up in Jerusalem as if in a prison, totaled nearly three million. It was indeed proper that in the very week in which they had brought the Savior and benefactor of mankind, God's Christ, to his passion, they should be shut up as if in a prison and suffer the destruction that came upon them by the judgment of God.

Passing over the details of the successive disasters that befell them from the sword and in other ways, I think it necessary to mention only the miseries they suffered from starvation, so that readers of this book may have some knowledge at least of how their crime against the Christ of God a very little time later brought on them God's vengeance.

Come then, pick up once more Book V of Josephus's Histories, and go through the tragic story of what then happened.

For the wealthy it was just as dangerous to stay in the city as to leave it, for on the pretext that he was a deserter many a man was killed for the sake of his money. As the famine grew worse, the frenzy of the partisans increased with it, and every day these two terrors strengthened their grip. Nowhere was there corn to be seen, so men broke into the homes and ransacked them. If they found some, they maltreated the occupants for saying there was none; if they did not, they suspected them of having hidden it more carefully, and tortured them. Proof that they had or had not food was provided

by the appearance of the unhappy wretches. If they still had flesh on their bones, they were deemed to have plenty of stores; if they were already reduced to skeletons they were passed over, for it seemed pointless to dispatch those who were certain to die of starvation before long. Many secretly exchanged their possessions for a measure of corn – wheat if they happened to be rich, barley if they were poor. Then they shut themselves up in the darkest corners of their houses, where some through extreme hunger ate their grain as it was, and others made bread, necessity and fear being the only guides. Nowhere was a table laid – they snatched the food from the fire while still uncooked, and ate like wolves.

The sight of such misery would have brought tears to the eyes, for while the strong had more than enough, the weak were in desperate straits. All human feelings, alas, yield to hunger, of which decency is always the first victim; for when hunger reigns, restraint is abandoned. Thus it was that wives robbed their husbands, children their fathers, and – most horrible of all – mothers their babes, snatching the food out of their very mouths; and when their dearest ones were dying in their arms, they did not hesitate to deprive them of the morsels that might have kept them alive. This way of satisfying their hunger did not go unnoticed: everywhere the partisans were ready to swoop even on such pickings. Wherever they saw a locked door, they concluded that those within were having a meal, and instantly bursting the door open, they rushed in and hardly stopped short of squeezing their throats to force out the morsels of food. They beat old men who held on to their crusts, and tore the hair of women who hid what was in their hands. They showed no pity for grey hairs or helpless babyhood, but picked up the children as they clung to their precious scraps and dashed them on the floor. If anyone anticipated their entry by gulping down what they hoped to seize, they felt themselves defrauded and retaliated with worse savagery still.

Terrible were the methods of torture they devised in their quest for food. They stuffed bitter vetch up the genital passages of their victims, and drove sharp stakes into their seats. Torments horrible even to think about they inflicted on people, to make them admit possession of one loaf or reveal the hiding place of a single handful of barley. It was not that the tormentors were hungry – their actions would have been less barbarous had they sprung from necessity – but rather they were keeping their passions exercised, and laying in store for use in the coming days. Again, when men had crawled out in the night as far as the Roman guard posts to collect wild plants and herbs, just when they thought they had got safely away from the enemy lines these marauders met them and snatched their treasures from them. Piteous entreaties and appeals to the awful name of God could not secure the return of even a fraction of what they had collected at such risk: they were lucky to be only robbed, and not killed as well.

The Jews, unable now to leave the city, were deprived of all hope of survival. The famine became more intense, and devoured whole houses and families. The roofs were covered with women and infants too weak to stand, the streets full of old men already dead. Young men and boys, swollen with hunger, haunted the squares like ghosts and fell wherever faintness overcame them. To bury their kinsfolk was beyond the strength of the sick, and those who were fit shirked the task because of the number of the dead and uncertainty about their own fate; for many while burying others fell dead themselves, and many set out for their graves before their hour struck. In their misery no weeping or

lamentation was heard; hunger stifled emotion; with dry eyes those who were slow to die watched those whose end came sooner. Deep silence enfolded the city and a darkness burdened with death. Worse still were the bandits, who broke like tomb-robbers into the houses of the dead and stripped the bodies, snatching off their wrappings then came out laughing. They tried the points of their swords on the corpses, and even transfixed some of those who lay helpless but still alive, to test the steel. But if any begged for a sword thrust to end their sufferings, they contemptuously left them to die of hunger. Everyone as he breathed his last fixed his eyes on the temple, turning his back on the partisans he was leaving alive. The latter at first ordered the dead to be buried at public expense, as they could not bear the stench; later, when this proved impossible, they threw them from the walls into the valleys. When in the course of his rounds Titus saw them choked with death, and a putrid stream trickling from under the decomposing bodies, he groaned, and uplifting his hands called God to witness that this was not his doing.

I cannot refrain from saying what my feelings dictate. I think that if the Romans had delayed their attack on these sacrilegious ruffians, either the ground would have opened and swallowed up the city, or a flood would have overwhelmed it, or lightning would have destroyed it like Sodom. For it produced a generation far more godless than those who perished thus, a generation whose mad folly involved the nation in ruin.

In the city famine raged, in victims dropping dead in countless numbers, and the horrors were unspeakable. In every home, if the shadow of something to eat was anywhere detected, war broke out and the best of friends came to grips with each other, snatching away the most wretched means of support. Not even the dying were believed to be in want; at their last gasp they were searched by the bandits, in case some of them had food inside their clothes and were feigning death. Open-mouthed with hunger like mad dogs, the desperadoes stumbled and staggered along, hammering at the doors like drunken men, and in their helpless state breaking into the same houses two or three times in a single hour. Necessity made them put their teeth in everything; things not even the filthiest of dumb animals would look at, they picked up and brought themselves to swallow. In the end they actually devoured belts and shoes, and stripped off the leather from their shields and chewed it. Some tried to live on scraps of old hay, for there were people who collected the stalks and sold a tiny bunch for fifteen shillings!

But why should I speak of the inanimate things that hunger made them shameless enough to eat? I am now going to relate a deed for which there is no parallel in the annals of Greece or any other country, a deed horrible to speak of and incredible to hear. For myself I am so anxious that future ages should not suspect me of grotesque inventions that I would gladly have passed over this calamity in silence, had there not been countless witnesses of my own generation to bear me out; and besides, my country would have little reason to thank me if I drew a veil over the miseries that were so real to her.

There was a woman, Mary the daughter of Eleazar, who lived east of Jordan in the village of Bathezor. She was of good family and very rich, and had fled with the rest of the population to Jerusalem, where she shared in the horrors of the siege. Most of the property that she had packed up and moved from

Peraea into the city had been plundered by the party chiefs; the remnants of her treasures and any food she had managed to obtain, were being carried off in daily raids by their henchmen. The wretched woman was filled with uncontrollable fury, and let loose a stream of abuse and curses that enraged the looters against her. When neither resentment nor pity caused anyone to kill her, and she grew tired of finding food for others – and whichever way she turned it was almost impossible to find – and while hunger was eating her heart out and rage was consuming her still faster, she yielded to the suggestions of fury and necessity, and in defiance of all natural feeling laid hands on her own child, a babe at the breast. “Poor little mite!” she cried. In war, famine, and civil strife, why do I keep you alive? With the Romans there is only slavery, even if we are alive when they come; but famine is forestalling slavery, and the partisans are crueller than either. Come, you must be food for me, to the partisans an avenging spirit, and to the world a tale, the only thing left to fill up the measure of Jewish misery. As she spoke she killed her son, then roasted him and ate one half, concealing and saving up the rest.

At once the partisans appeared, and sniffing the unholy smell, threatened that if she did not produce what she had prepared they would kill her on the spot. She replied that she had kept a fine helping for them, and uncovered what was left of her child. They, overcome with instant horror and amazement, could not take their eyes off the sight. But she went on: This child is my own, and the deed is mine too. Help yourselves: I have had my share. Don’t be softer than a woman or more tender-hearted than a mother! But if you are squeamish, and don’t approve of my sacrifice – well, I have eaten half, so you may as well leave me the rest. That was the last straw, and they went away quivering. They had never before shrunk from anything, and did not much like giving up even this food to the mother. From that moment the entire city could think of nothing else but the abomination; everyone saw the tragedy before his own eyes, and shuddered as if the crime was his. The one desire of the starving was for death: how they envied those who had gone before seeking or hearing of these appalling horrors!

In computing the whole number of those who lost their lives, the historian says that famine and the sword destroyed 1,100,000 persons; that those who had taken part in sedition and terrorism informed against each other after the capture of the city and were put to death; that the tallest and handsomest of the youngsters were kept for the triumphal procession; that of the rest, those over seventeen were put in irons and sent to hard labor in Egypt, and still more were distributed among the provinces to perish in the theatres by sword or by wild beasts, while those under seventeen were carried off captive and sold, the number of these alone reaching 90,000.

These things happened in the second year of Vespasian’s reign, in exact accordance with the prophetic predictions of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who by divine power had foreseen them as though already present, and wept and mourned over them, as we learn from the holy evangelists, who have set down his very words. On one occasion he said as if to Jerusalem herself:

“If only you, even you, had known today the way to your peace! But now it has been hidden from your sight. For a time will come upon you when your enemies will throw up an earthwork round you and encircle you and hem you in on every side, and bring to the ground both you and your children.

On another occasion, with the people in mind, he said: For there will be great distress in the land, and indignation against this people: they will fall at the point of the sword, and they will be carried into captivity in every heathen land; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by heathen, till the day of the heathen is over.

And again: When you see Jerusalem encircled by armies, then you may be sure that her desolation has drawn near.

The events and horrible tragedies recorded by Josephus, the Jewish historian, fill in the requirements of the predictions of Mt. 24. Josephus was a Jew himself and also a priest. At first he was against the Roman invasion of Jerusalem. Later, when he saw how futile any attempt at defense was, he began to appeal to the people within the city to surrender to the Romans. He was bitterly hated for this. Even on behalf of Titus, he made an appeal for their surrender with the assurance that they would not be killed. Blind rage, coupled with a fanatical zeal that God was going to deliver them as he had done so many times in the past, caused them to reject any plea to lay down their arms. They could not see that the judgments of God were against them and there was no way of escape.

One more foot note to all of this is about the Roman leader. The siege and war against Jerusalem began about 67 A.D., while Nero was still the emperor of Rome. He committed suicide in 68 A.D. and for about one year Galba and Otho ruled. Meanwhile the siege was in place and increasing. Then Vespasian, who was in charge of the armies of Rome and was at Jerusalem, because of his leadership and respect by the armies, was chosen as emperor. He immediately left for Rome to take up his seat of authority there. He left Titus, his son, in charge of the army and the siege. Titus maintained this position until Jerusalem was destroyed. After Vespasian, Titus also became emperor. But Vespasian was emperor at the fall of Jerusalem and his son Titus was head of the army.

7-22-14

