**MATTHEW 24 AND THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM**

In Matthew 24, Jesus prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem, which would take place forty years later, in 70-AD. Careful Bible students generally take one of two views on this text: **1.)** ***Half of the chapter*** tells of the destruction of Jerusalem (v.1-35); while the other half tells about the final judgment at the end of time (v.36-51). Or, **2.)** ***The entire chapter***deals with the destruction of Jerusalem, with the transition to the final judgment beginning at Matthew 25:1. For my part, I believe the latter view. In this article, I want to clarify why I believe these things. Space is limited, so please read carefully as I explain why I believe ***all*** of Matthew 24 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.

First, the ***introductory remarks*** make it clear that Jesus speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt.24:1-3). Then, we learn that the gospel was supposed to be ***“preached in all the world”*** before ***“the end”*** (of Jerusalem) comes (v.14). In the book of Colossians, we see that the gospel had indeed been preached in all the world just a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem (Col.1:6,23). Next, Jesus spoke of the ***“abomination of desolation”*** standing in ***“the holy place”*** – a clear reference to the temple (Mt.24:15). Then, he spoke of those in ***“Judea”*** (not the USA) fleeing to safety (v.16-18) – but one cannot flee from the final judgment! Further, Jesus said they should pray that their flight to safety not be ***“on the Sabbath”*** (v.20). That instruction would have no significance to us today; but DID have meaning to Jews in the first century! Also, when ***His disciples*** saw all these signs, they would know that the fall of Jerusalem was near (v.32-33). By contrast, there are NO signs for the end of time (1Th.5:1-3)! Next, Jesus said that all the things of which He spoke were to come upon ***“this generation”*** (v.34) – i.e. the generation then living. Finally, as a result of Jerusalem’s destruction, Jesus said one would be ***“taken”*** (into captivity), while another would be ***“left”*** (v.40-41). But in the final judgment, NO ONE will be left behind, for everyone will be dealt with! These are just a few of the reasons I believe the entire chapter refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Now let us clear up some of the questions raised by this interpretation. First, “the end of the ***world”*** (v.3, KJV) is not correctly translated. It should be “the end of the ***age”*** (NKJV) – a reference to the ***Jewish age*** (v.14; cf. Col.1:23). The reference to the darkening of the sun and moon, falling stars, and shaken powers (v.29) is figurative language. It is often used in the OT for the judgment of the nations (cp. Isa.13:1,9-13). The reference to the Son of Man coming in the clouds (v.30) is also a figurative reference to Divine judgment upon the nations (cp. Isa.19:1-4). And the reference to the angels gathering the elect (v.31) is symbolic of God’s protection of His people (cp. Rev.7:1-3). Christians would be protected ***through*** (not from) this great hour of trial which was to come upon the earth (cf. Mt.24:21). And finally, the phrase, ***“But of that day and hour no one knows”*** (v.36), simply means that while they would know when Jerusalem’s destruction was NEAR (v.32-33), they would not know the actual “day” when its destruction would begin. Hopefully, this paragraph will clear up some of the “problem areas” of Matthew 24, and tie it all together in an understandable way.

Finally, it should not surprise us that much of this language ***sounds like*** the final judgment. The terrifying language of judgment ***will*** sound very similar in every case! Whether the reference is to the judgment of the nations (see OT), or the judgment of all humanity at the end of time, the “common denominator” is JUDGMENT! The problem is with our ASSUMPTION that all “judgment language” MUST refer to the FINAL judgment. In view of the OT, there is no logical reason to make this assumption. If we would familiarize ourselves with this kind of Biblical language, we would not jump to such erroneous conclusions! I realize I’ve tried to cover a lot of ground in a short space, so read with care. But I do hope that I have helped to clarify Matthew 24 in some way.

--Lanny Smith