



MY SOJOURN
IN STUDIES OF
MATTHEW ²⁴
&
THE PARALLEL
SCRIPTURES

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I. Introduction

Bible students who come upon Matthew, chapter 24, & the parallel chapters of Mark 13 & Luke 24 for the 1st time will seize upon the impression these chapters speak of the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ. It was no different for me. Since our hope is to see the return of our Lord it is natural that we should think this way. However, as I studied the Bible more I realized I faced problems with this interpretation. As my sojourn with Christ continued I have come to view these scriptures as having nothing to do with Christ's 2nd coming but rather they are all about events that have already taken place. They record the remarkable prophecy Jesus made about the desolations upon the Jews at the hands of the Roman armies in the 1st century A.D. The purpose of this writing is to explain why I changed my mind from my 1st impression & how I came to view these chapters as fulfilled prophecy.

II. The Second Coming Of Christ

The fact that I do not believe these three chapters in the Gospels relate to the 2nd coming of the Lord in no way means I deny the reality of the event. I believe the Bible teaches Christ will actually, literally return to earth, raise the dead, & receive those that are His who are alive at His coming. Since this is not the main thrust of this writing I do not intend to spend a lot of time on this point but it is important to stress the fact that the scriptures support the saints' claim that the Lord will come back to earth again. Paul called it the "blessed hope" in Titus 2.13. Mark his words: "Looking for that BLESSED HOPE, and GLORIOUS APPEARING of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." His appearing encompasses the hope we have. Saints in every age have had the expectation of the return of the Lord. Christ made this a promise to His disciples in conversation with them the night before He was crucified: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN, AND RECEIVE YOU UNTO MYSELF; THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YE MAY BE ALSO" (John 14.1-3). These are precious words that warm the hearts of all believers. Furthermore, Luke wrote of the events of Christ's ascension in this way: "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN." (Acts 1.9-11). Again, these are words that confirm our expectation of His 2nd coming.

Furthermore, there are the words of Paul that link the coming of the Lord to the resurrection of the dead: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto THE COMING OF THE LORD shall not prevent (that is, go before) them which are asleep. FOR THE LORD HIMSELF SHALL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN WITH A SHOUT, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4.13-18). Paul also echoed some of the same thoughts in other letters. He told the Philippians: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we LOOK FOR THE SAVIOUR, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Philippians 3.20-21). And in Colossians 3.4 he said: "When Christ, who is our life, SHALL APPEAR, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

Peter confronted the scoffers of his day, who, with great impatience cried out, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." After attacking their doubts, he plainly declared, "But the day of the Lord WILL COME as a thief in the night" (II Peter 3.3-10).

John also wrote in his epistle: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM; FOR WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS" (I John 3.2).

The Lord's Supper must also figure into this matter for Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death TILL HE COME" (I Corinthians 11.26). The fact there are saints still observing His supper should convince us we wait yet for a future coming.

Seeing his warfare on earth was nearing an end, Paul said to Timothy: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, BUT UNTO ALL THEM ALSO THAT LOVE HIS APPEARING" (II Timothy 4.8). Indeed! This desire for Christ's return was in John's heart as well. In the next to the last verse of the Bible Jesus Himself assured the believer: "Surely I come quickly," and to this was John's cry: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22.20). This is also our desire.

More passages from the Bible could be cited but these should be more than sufficient to show the actual, literal reappearing of the Lord was a vital part of apostolic doctrine.

III. The Sense Of The Scripture

Upon the Jews return from Babylonian Captivity it is recorded in Nehemiah, chapter 8 that Ezra, the scribe, & others with him, “stood upon a pulpit of wood,” & addressed the people. In such a way “they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, & GAVE THE SENSE, and caused them to understand the reading” (verses 4, 8). I pick up the thought that is contained in this language. To rightly divide the Word of God it is needful for the instructor to understand it himself. But how is this done? What approaches should he take in his own study of the Bible to insure that he is giving the rightful sense of verses he uses to teach the people? Let me suggest four.

1st, it is important to take note of the context. In the portion of scripture before the reader he should ask, what is the inspired writer saying? It is necessary not only to look at verses above the text but also verses below the text in order to follow the line of thought that is written. How often do we have to confront free-willers who try to advance their doctrine by neglecting what the scriptures they quote actually say? For example, the Arminian’s claim that God wants everyone to be saved is enhanced when they quote part of Peter’s words: “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” However, an entirely different meaning is shown when the full verse is quoted: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering TO US-WARD, not willing that ANY should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance” (II Peter 3.9). Then, it is clear that “any” & “all” related solely to God’s longsuffering to those referred to as “us-ward.” And by further examining the chapter it becomes plain Peter is responding to the scoffers by saying the Lord will not come again until such time as all of the “us-ward” are brought to repentance. Context is important in giving the sense of the scriptures.

2nd, it is also important to relate the text under consideration appropriately to other texts. I will cite an example of what I mean. Jeremiah spoke of the New Covenant. It was a Covenant that was considerably different from the First Covenant. It was one that instead of being written upon tablets of stone was to be written within the hearts of men. It did not require men teaching others to “know the LORD.” They already would know Him. It was a Covenant that promised the people their sins would be remitted. But who are promised this Covenant? Listen to the words: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31.31-34). If we have no other scripture to look at than this text we Gentiles would have no reason to hope that we were included in these covenant blessings, would we? But we do have other scripture, don't we? Paul wrote to our comfort: “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; But he is a Jew, which IS ONE INWARDLY; and circumcision IS THAT OF THE HEART, IN THE SPIRIT, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2.28-29). Now, by connecting what Jeremiah wrote concerning the inward work under the address to the house of Israel & Judah with what Paul said concerning the Jew that was one inwardly it is plain that the believing Gentiles can identify with the same Covenant that is spoken to the house of Israel/Judah. We appropriately link scripture to see the deeper truth. We give the sense of the scripture.

3rd, the meaning of words themselves can often prove to be very important in interpreting scripture. Because both the Old as well as the New Testaments were written respectively in ancient Hebrew & ancient Greek & translated into English it is always a good idea to have reference material available. Webster’s Dictionary may work fine to find the meaning of English words but it is a weak tool for checking the meaning of Hebrew or Greek words. Analytical Concordances & Hebrew & Greek

Lexicons are a lot better tools. I will cite an example among many. There are two prominent words used in the New Testament for “world.” When Paul wrote that God had chosen His people in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1.4) he used the Greek word “kosmos”. This word relates to the planet. However, when Jesus said “whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither the world (implied the 2nd time) to come” (Matthew 12.32) he used the Greek word “aion”. This word relates to time. Christ is saying that person will neither be forgiven in this age or in the age to come. We may value our English Bibles but there are cases that show clearly the translators used certain English words to cover up the truth concerning what the original languages actually taught. In order for the members of the Church of England to think it proper to sprinkle they translated John the Baptist’s words to the people: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance” (Matthew 3.11). A clearer & more accurate translation would have been “I dip you in water”. By covering up what baptism actually consisted of the people of England were kept from the truth. And I think the scholars of the time knew better. Understanding the meaning of words is important in giving the sense of the scriptures.

I will mention a 4th with some reservations. It is important we use common sense when we interpret scripture. This approach must be used with the utmost care. We cannot depend upon human reasoning. Yet, it does need to be considered in a limited way. When Paul gave his opinion that widows should remain unmarried, he gave this as “my judgment” & then added the words, “and I think also that I have the Spirit of God” (I Corinthians 7.40). Likewise, the spiritual man may be able to reason the meaning of scripture in ways that unregenerate men never can. An example of what I am saying is found in the standards found for considering a man for the office of bishop (elder). Among other things Paul said he must be “the husband of one wife” (I Timothy 3.2). Down in verses 4-5 he wrote: “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)” If we go by the strictest literal interpretation an unmarried man can never be considered fit for the office of elder. If he had a wife & she died he would no longer meet the standard given by Paul. Likewise, what should we do with the man & his wife who have no children? I don't think these things have ever given Old School Baptists a problem? Wisdom here does prevail among us. We realize that Paul’s meaning is that a man who has more than one living wife, or a man who has unruly children should not be considered for the office, but he did not mean to convey the idea being married & having children were mandatory requirements. So, when interpreting scripture, there is a place for the use of good judgment.

I realize the four approaches I listed are not revolutionary approaches. They are simple methods we all use on a regular basis. However, due to the fact I will be incorporating all of them into what I write about the meaning of Christ’s words I want it to be understood how I will be giving the sense to the words.

We all like to think of ourselves as literalists when it comes to understanding the words of the Bible. But, in fact, we all might have a hard time arriving at an understanding what it means to be literal. Even if we can come to terms with what it means to be literal, unless our definition is quite broad, it is probably very hard for any of us to attain this goal. Some of the Bible is written in poetic style. We must deal with many parables. We also find a lot of analogies. Parts of the Bible contain visionary language. There are metaphors upon metaphors. We are so accustomed to reading words that we probably never stop to ask ourselves if we are interpreting them in an absolutely literal way. In the 12th verse of Jude the writer spoke of the ungodly men who crept in among the saints (verse 4) as “clouds without water.” Now are they actually that? Have you departed from literalism if you deny them to

actually be clouds? Well, if you must actually think they are “clouds without water” in order to be a literalist you will probably have to admit you are not one. On the other hand, if by literalism, your definition can encompass the meaning intended by the writer to show they were lofty-minded souls who could bring forth no source of refreshing blessing; then you can still claim to be a literalist. It is the latter way I will go. Following the sense of the scripture is what is important to me.

Since it is so vital to my attempt to explain Matthew, chapter 24 & the other parallel chapters, I have spent this much time dealing with the issue of literalness.

IV. The Outline Of The Three Chapters

Having covered the approaches I use in interpreting scripture I now turn to an examination of Matthew 24 along with the other pertinent texts related to it.

If anyone would sit down at a table with three Bibles; one opened to Matthew, chapter 24, another opened to Mark, chapter 13, & another opened to Luke, chapter 21; & if that person would follow what each Gospel writer said, he will find there is a common outline in all three of the chapters. No, it is not word for word the same. As a matter of fact the reader will find that one writer might even provide key details that the other two do not. Nevertheless, he will find harmony in the outline.

Matthew's account speaks of the prophecy of the temple's destruction & the questions arising from that in verses 1-3. Mark accounts for the same in the 1st 4 verses of the chapter, & Luke accounts for the same in verses 5-7. Next, comes mention of the deceptions & commotions that will occur: Matthew, verses 4-8, Mark, verses 5-8, & Luke, verses 8-11. Then, Christ discussed the personal afflictions & temptations of His disciples in the face of preaching the Gospel throughout the world: Matthew, verses 9-14, Mark, verses 9-13, & Luke, verses 12-19. Each writer then spoke of the abomination of desolation (Matthew, verse 15, Mark, the 1st part of verse 14, & Luke, verse 20); followed by instructions to avoid the woes due to the desolations (Matthew, verses 18-28, Mark, the 2nd part of verse 14-23, & Luke, verses 21-24). After the great tribulation, the Lord spoke of the great wonders that would occur & the gathering of the elect: Matthew, verses 29-35, Mark, verses 24-31, & Luke, verses 25-33. The accounting of this prophecy ends with the fact the specific time of the future events are not revealed & with warnings given to the hearers to be watchful: Matthew, verses 36-51, Mark, verses 32-37, & Luke, verses 34-36.

So, one sees there is a unity by all three of the writers in the record of this prophecy.

V. The Questions

Let me relate a personal experience. About 8 or 9 years into being a regular reader of the Bible I was one day reading the 24th chapter of Matthew when all of a sudden something remarkable happened to me. I actually paid attention to detail. I noticed what precipitated the words contained in this chapter. Here is what it was. After the disciples came to show Him the buildings of the temple, Jesus told them, “verily I say unto you, There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (verse 2). This remark, in turn, provoked the disciples to ask Christ three questions. 1st, they asked, “when shall these things be?” In other words, when will the temple be destroyed? 2nd, they asked for the sign of His coming, & 3rd, they asked about the end of the world (verse 3). Simply by noticing for the 1st time this obvious detail I started the journey toward realizing what the chapter was all about. However, I still had a long way to go. I immediately started trying to figure out what verses related to the temple’s destruction, what verses related to Christ’s return to earth, & what verses related to the end of the world. I reasoned that the end of the world was so closely integrated into His coming that if I could figure out the one I would also know the other. But I was unable to determine what part of the text related to the destroying of the temple & what part related to Christ’s coming at the end of the world. At least I had taken one step toward progress. I now had abandoned the period of 1st impression where I could only think of the chapter in terms of the Lord coming back at the end of time.

After a period of time in which I made absolutely no progress toward separating the verses along the lines of the three questions I decided to consult John Gill. I pulled his commentary from my bookcase & began reading what he had to say. Well, to say the least he did not help me. What he had to say was something I did not want to hear. He wrote that the whole chapter only related to the destruction upon the Jewish people by the Romans in 70 A.D. I wondered how he could so easily consider that the great wonders described in verse 29 & the various references in the chapter to the Lord’s coming could be categorized as fulfilled prophecy. I had enough of Gill on this matter so I consulted Adam Clarke. I generally preferred Gill to Clarke. After all, Gill was a predestinarian whereas Clarke was an Arminian. But Clarke had this advantage over Gill. He was usually more to the point than Gill. You could more quickly pick up Clarke’s views concerning a verse than you could when reading the tedious Gill. However, I discovered Clarke had the same views as Gill. With regard to this chapter the predestinarian Gill & the Arminian Clarke were in full agreement.

I discarded both of these commentaries & again started trying to figure the chapter out for myself. I still could not work things out. The word “immediately” in verse 29 gave me all sorts of fits. I had reached the point where I could see that verses 4-21 might (I say, might) have reference to the times leading up to 70 A.D. but I could not see how what was said in verses 29-31 could possible relate to something that had already occurred in history. Yet, there was the word, “immediately.” I could not neglect the context. In verse 21, the scripture spoke of the “great tribulation” but in verse 29 the scripture said: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days.” It then described the wonders & the Lord’s coming that I still held could not have happened yet. I tried every way possible to make “immediately” mean something other than “immediately” but it always came out the same. The word meant “immediately.” There was no getting around that fact. I do not mean to over simplify the problems I faced interpreting this chapter. There were other verses that puzzled me as well but this thing about “immediately” stood as my biggest test.

I remained puzzled over how to come to grips with this chapter for about 15 years. Periodically, I would go back & reread the text hoping to find a clear way to understand it. Finally, I did. While

reading what was said, the 2nd question the disciples asked struck me in a way it had never done before: “and what shall be the sign of thy coming?” I realized suddenly that my perspective of the Lord’s coming would be entirely different from the perspective of the disciples at that particular time. Since He has already come the 1st time through His birth into this world & then departed I now look for His 2nd coming? But this was not where the view of the disciples would have been at that time. He had not yet left to go back into heaven. They would not have had the mind to ask Him when are you coming back again. For a hitter in baseball to reach 2nd base he must reach 1st base. Where these disciples were in their thinking, it would appear they had hardly laid down the bat to run to 1st base after hitting a ground ball to the shortstop. Consider their state of mind. I could be lengthy at this point & give full documentation of the disciples’ mind set. I will not do so. I don’t think it will be necessary. I don’t think I will receive any argument when I say that when Jesus 1st announced He would go into Jerusalem, suffer many things there, be killed & then arise again, the disciples had a hard time accepting what Jesus said. He told them they would also forsake Him. He even told Peter He would deny Him 3 times. This was hard for them to believe. The resurrection did not sink into their minds at the time. Their 1st sight of Him after He came out of the grave was to not recognize Him. Even after the women who went to the tomb & found it empty reported to the disciples that He was alive the disciples found it hard to believe. Even the reports of those who saw Him alive were not readily received. Even the ones who saw Him at 1st did not recognize Him; that He was alive. The angel’s instruction unto the women who went to the tomb was to tell the disciples “that goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him” (Matthew 28.7). There is no evidence the disciples ran to Galilee to find Him. They stayed in Judea. Even as late as the time when the 11 went into a Galilean mountain after His resurrection the scripture said: “And when they saw him, they worshipped him: BUT SOME DOUBTED” (Matthew 28.17). At the time Jesus spoke concerning the temple’s destruction He had not yet spoken to them about going away & coming again to receive them. That conversation had come the night before He was crucified, & even if it sank into their minds what He had said, they had not yet witnessed His ascension into heaven. I, therefore, submit these disciples were not even at the point in their thinking to ask the Lord about a 2nd coming.

What then did they mean? They wanted to know when He would make it plain that He had come in the person He had claimed: the Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Savior, the King of the Jews. You may think they already had sufficient evidence of this. Surely they had. Peter had already confessed that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, but by the same token John the Baptist had confessed Him to be the Lamb of God but from prison he sent his disciples to Jesus to inquire: “Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?” (Luke 7.19). Are there contradictions? Yes, there are. But the contradictions are not contradictions of scripture. The contradictions are with the believers themselves. Sometimes they seemed enlightened. Other times they seemed as blind as bats. Repeatedly, Jesus rebuked them for their little faith. The consistent clarity of their minds that was demonstrated from the day of Pentecost onward was not to be found in them at this earlier time. They often were unable to fit pieces of puzzles together. Continually they needed a new miracle. They saw He was able to feed a multitude with only 5 loaves & two fish, but when He would do the same thing at another time when they only had 7 loaves & a few small fish they asked Him: “Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?” (Matthew 15.33). The fact He had just done a similar miracle before seemed to have completely gone by them. I can see them scratching their heads in wonderment when He said of little children: “of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19.14). That would have made no sense to them. I am sure it made little sense to them what Jesus said when the mother asked that her two sons sit next to Him in His kingdom. He told them: “whosoever

will be great among you, let him be your minister” (Matthew 20.26). That would not be what they would expect to hear from a King. If He were the Son of God, how is it possible His enemies would be able to kill Him? Even after His resurrection they were still thinking He might be ready to restore in a visible way the Kingdom of Israel. Will you do it now, they asked (Acts 1.6). With their little faith, & with their inability to put together the pieces into one solid whole, they still wanted a sign of His coming.

Unbelievers had asked Him for a sign as well. Jesus told them “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s (fish’s) belly; so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12.39-40). Jesus had more to say to these unbelievers than this. He then spoke to them about the judgment that would come upon them. Read the next verses through verse 45. Both the people of Nineveh & the queen of the south would rise up against “this generation and condemn it”. The people of Nineveh had repented at Jonah’s preaching but a greater was present with them than Jonah. The queen of the south had come from afar to hear Solomon’s wisdom but one wiser than Solomon was among them. The unclean spirit can find no rest when he leaves a man so he returns to a house that he claims to be his, but when he does return he finds it “swept, and garnished.” Oh, but he also finds it empty. For all of the glamorous appearance of their self-righteousness they still had no more than “a form of godliness - denying the power thereof” (II Timothy 3.5). Mark this: “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” (verse 45). He applied these words to the generation of Jews that had asked for this sign.

Now read the parable of Matthew 21.33-46 & see how this parallels truths found in the 24th chapter. Then read the parable of Matthew 22.1-14 & see if this also does not parallel what the Jews did to Jesus, what the ministers did in preaching to the Gentiles, & what the Romans did to Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The 24th chapter foretold judgment. In the chapter there are no statements about the resurrection & there are no statements made about the rapture. Yes, it did include some statements concerning deliverance but the deliverance was to come by watchfulness & following His instructions what to do when judgment came. To these believers Christ went beyond the sign of the prophet Jonah in answering the question. The sign given to them was that He would appear in judgment upon the wicked nation. This was Jesus’ response to the question, “what shall be the sign of thy coming?”

I will deal more fully with the 3rd question, “and of the end of the world?” later. Let it satisfy for the present to point out that the world spoken of here is a time-world. The word is not “kosmos”; it is “aion.” They were asking Him about the end of the age. The destruction of the planet is not under consideration.

Before going further it should be noted that if we had no more than Mark’s account & Luke’s account before us we would have no reason at all to think Jesus was speaking about anything else other than the temple’s destruction. In Mark’s account the disciples asked: “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?” (Mark 13.4). Do you see this? In Matthew, it is the sign of the Lord’s coming. In Mark, it is the sign of the fulfilling of these things. In Luke’s account the wording is: “And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?” (Luke 21.7). Again, the sign they

are asking Him about concerns the destruction of the temple. I submit that the 3 questions found in Matthew's account is in substance just one question. Therefore, in case someone wonders why I continually refer to the Lord's coming mentioned in Matthew's account as a coming in judgment it is simply because when you take Mark's & Luke's account concerning the SIGN of the accomplishment of the desolations & couple it with Matthew's wording of the SIGN of His coming the combination of thought comes out as a coming in judgment. Did the disciples word their inquiry as recorded in Matthew? Yes, I believe they did. Yet, the sign of His coming & the end of the world was so inseparably linked to the question about the destruction of the temple it is really to be understood as branches from just the one question.

VI. Evidence Of Some Of The Events

Throughout verses 4-28 Jesus foretold a series of events that would occur. By both secular historic records & Biblical accounts these events can be traced to the times leading up to the 1st century desolations. Therefore, I will deal with them very briefly.

I will cite the commentaries of both Gill & Clarke for the events mentioned through verse 7. For deceivers claiming to be Christ, they cite a man named Theudas (not to be identified with the Theudas spoken of in Acts 5.36), the Egyptian who is spoken of in Acts 21.38, Simon who is spoken of in the 8th chapter of Acts, a man named Dositheus the Samaritan, and another man named Meander. Concerning the wars & rumors of wars they cite the many commotions, insurrections, & seditions against the Romans: some against the governor Cumanus at a time of the Passover, & others in Ascalon, Ptolemais, Alexandria, & Demascus. As far as the nations & kingdoms rising up against one another, they cite the Jews against the Samaritans, Syrians, and Romans; & in the Roman Empire the fighting between Otho & Vitellius, & Vitellius & Vespasian; & the continuing struggle of the Romans against the Jews. With regard to the famines & pestilences, they referred to what Agabus prophesied (Acts 11.28), & another one referred to by Josephus while Jerusalem was under attack. As far as the earthquakes, they noted one at Crete, Phrygia, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, & 2 at Rome. Luke's account also had included "fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven" (verse 11). The commentaries said there was a comet over Jerusalem for about a year, there was a star that hung over the city like a sword, & there appeared a great light about the altar & temple.

Other events are foretold in verses 9-14. You need to go no further than the New Testament to confirm the fact they came to pass during apostolic times. You can see the Lord's words confirmed that the disciples would be taken to be afflicted (Acts 4.6-21; 5.17-40; & 12.1-19). Also there were the many afflictions of Paul. He summarized many of them in II Corinthians 11.23-27. Even Paul, before his conversion, was a chief figure in the persecution of believers (Acts 8.1-4). With regard to killings, we have specific references to the martyrdoms of Stephen, James, & Antipas (Acts 7.59-60, 12.1-2; & Revelation 2.13). As far as the betrayals are concerned, one of the things mentioned by Paul as a part of his own afflictions was the "perils among false brethren" (II Corinthians 11.26). We can find the false prophets & deceivers identified by the Gnostics who John called antichrist. They were folk who did not believe Christ came in the flesh (I John 4.1-4; II John 7). There were also "Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (II Timothy 2.17-18). Christ, through the Revelation, spoke to Pergamos' angel against those "that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication" & against "them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes" (Revelation 2.14-15). Contrary to the popular view today that the Gospel has yet to be preached throughout the world, Paul confirmed that within Christ's meaning it had been spread throughout the world when he wrote as he did in Romans 11.18.

After the great tribulation referred to in verse 21, Jesus foretold there would arise false Christ's & prophets who would perform great wonders. Gill cites two men who could be identified by this language: a man named Jonathan & a man named Barochab.

From all of these examples it may be concluded one does not have to look far into the future to see the fulfillment of the Lord's prophecy.

VII. Enter The Prophet Daniel

Sandwiched between many of the events foretold by our Lord He quoted from the prophecy of Daniel: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)” (verse 15). In Mark’s account the wording is: “But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not” (verse 14). However, it is what Luke provided that gives us the key pieces of information in order to interpret Daniel’s prophecy. In the same sequence described by both Matthew & Mark he wrote what was the meaning of the prophet’s words: “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh” (verse 20). In verse 22 he quoted Jesus: “For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.” I will use common sense here. These words must speak of the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy. Otherwise, it appears to me we will have to conclude there are no other prophecies to be accomplished. His words relate to the fulfillment of the days of vengeance. So, in verse 24, Luke quoted Christ: “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”. With the information provided by Luke it appears to me conclusive evidence the Lord spoke concerning the events leading up to & into 70 A.D. The Roman armies surrounded the city. They went into the temple. They profaned the temple. They caused the offerings to cease (see Daniel 9.27, 11.31, & 12.11). The Jews in great number were killed. Others who lived in the land were a scattered people. The Gentiles destroyed Jerusalem. The Gentiles also destroyed the temple. Even to this day we live in a time known as the day of the Gentiles. The blindness remains upon Israel. Paul refers to it as “blindness in part” due to the fact there remains a remnant among the Jews, but this blindness remains “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (Romans 11.25). There may be some promise of a change in the near future. The fact the Jews were reestablished in a state after the end of World War II, & the fact they now have the political/military power to control Jerusalem may give indication the time of the Gentiles may be close to an end. However, it has not yet come. Although the prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled in 70 A.D., the desolate condition remains. The words of Jesus remain true: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! BEHOLD, YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT UNTO YOU DESOLATE. FOR I SAY UNTO YOU, YE SHALL NOT SEE ME HENCEFORTH, TILL YE SHALL SAY, BLESSED IS HE THAT COMETH IN THE NAME OF THE LORD” (Matthew 23.37-39). So, returning to Romans, Paul wrote: “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Romans 11.26). To this day the Jews remain in their state of blindness, they do not call Him blessed, & they have not turned from ungodliness; so their house remains in an ongoing state of desolation.

By the Lord’s quote from Daniel, & by His references to what historically did follow it should be plain these three chapters in the Gospels are speaking exclusively about events that already have had their accomplishment. But, unfortunately, that is not the case. When I came to my present views I started telling others how I interpreted these scriptures. I thought I could make a solid case for my views. However, I encountered something I did not expect. Others agreed with me in part. They could see how the chapters dealt with the destruction of Jerusalem & many of the things that followed, but they also wanted to retain a view these scriptures also spoke of the literal, actual coming of Christ at a future place in time. In other words, they argued these chapters have to be understood in a two-fold sense. One is the destruction that has already occurred. The other is Christ’s future coming. I do have a

concept of two-fold applications in interpreting some scripture but until they brought this up to me I had never thought to apply it to these texts. As a matter of fact I still remain unconvinced a two-fold application fits this case.

Let me state the reason why I reject the two-fold approach. In Daniel, chapter 9, the prophet spoke of 70 weeks to accomplish the things that are identified in the verses from 24-27. These weeks commenced from the commandment to restore & build Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity. They were divided into, 1st, a 7 week period; 2nd, a 62 week period, & 3rd, a one week period. In this last week the sacrifice & oblation ceased, & “for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate” (verse 27). This is the Lord’s reference in Matthew, chapter 24 & the parallel scriptures. Now, our English Bibles refer to the time frame as 70 weeks. Actually, the Hebrew language is speaking about 70 “sevens.” The time segments are understood as years, not weeks as we today understand a week to be a time segment of 7 days. By the segments we should understand a period of a year. The thought goes back to Genesis 29.18-28. There, the scripture spoke of the time when Jacob served Laban for 7 years in order to have his daughter, Rachel, for his wife (verse 20). However, Laban did a double-cross on Jacob & gave him his oldest daughter, Leah, instead. He then told Jacob he must “fulfill her week” & serve him another 7 years in order to have Rachel for his wife (verses 27-28). What was a week was actually a period of 7 years. So, the 70 weeks are actually a total of 490 years. The last week was a period of 7 years. Christ’s reference to the abomination of desolation occurred in this last 7 years period.

If the time of Daniel’s prophecy was durational to the 70 weeks (years) there is not an option of a dual application. One must either say the events Christ foretold has been accomplished when the Roman army went into Jerusalem, profaned the temple & destroyed it along with the city, or else one must say the events foretold have not yet occurred. It does not leave the option of a two-fold application. If it already has an accomplishment in history the 70 weeks (years) have been fulfilled. What will you do? Will you start the 70 years all over again to get another abomination of desolation for the sake of a dual application? Or maybe you might want to consider starting just the one week (7 years) over again? But then that would mean there were 71 weeks, wouldn't it? Or maybe you might want to consider making the last week longer than all of the others in order to accommodate a dual application. No, I also would not advise going in that direction.

Furthermore, if we would take the fulfilling of the “days of vengeance” as spoken in Luke’s account to mean there will be another time in which armies will compass Jerusalem to fulfill Daniel’s prophecy again of the abomination of desolation then doesn't it make sense we would also have to say the time of the Gentiles will have ended once so that the Jews again will be killed & scattered about from their homeland in order to start anew the times of the Gentiles? For my part, I don't think repeating this prophecy is the answer. The prophecy was fulfilled in the 1st century A.D. It’s over. It’s a done deal.

VIII. Then

After the Lord spoke to the disciples about seeing “the abomination of desolation” He gave a series of warnings & instructions to them. These remarks are found in Matthew’s account, verses 15-22. His words were introduced by the word, “then”. What He advised the disciples to do is tantamount to telling them to hightail it out of the place. The cue in Luke’s account even precedes the actual abomination of the temple. He gave the warning to flee “when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies”. He told them, “then know that the desolation thereof is nigh” (verse 20). He told His disciples various things about this time. Those in Judea were to flee to the mountains. Anyone on the housetop was not to come down to take any thing from the house. Any one in the field was not to come back for his clothes. It would be a sorrowful situation for those with small children who needed their mothers’ milk. They should also pray that their travel neither would have to come in the winter nor on the Sabbath. The reason for all of this was because there “shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world (kosmos) to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (verse 21). If there is any positive note to make it is this: “for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (verse 22).

There are several observations to be made about what Jesus said. 1st, from Christ’s words it appears He is giving instructions that will enable the disciples to wait out this short period of tribulation. It fits the scheme of things that related to the events around 70 A.D. If the prophecy concerned the literal coming of Christ & the end of the world, what point is there to advise them to flee? The Lord is about to come anyway. It appears to me His remarks imply a return to normalcy after the short tribulation period. It is noteworthy that during this period the disciples were spared the tribulation caused by the Roman invasion simply because they did flee from the area of devastation. These disciples interpreted what Christ foretold pertained to their time. 2nd, what Jesus said in verse 28 is a fitting description of those days. He said: “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.” The eagle was the ensign of the Roman army. 3rd, again, what is said here does not fit into a two-fold application of the text. The tribulation was to be so great that Jesus indicated it would be a one-time event. Nothing like it occurred before. Nothing like it would happen again. So, take your pick. Either Jesus is describing a tribulation that has already taken place or else we are still waiting for the tribulation to happen in the future. If it happened once & then it is going to happen again it makes void the word of Christ: “no, nor ever shall be.” Applying the words to two different periods simply will not work.

IX. Immediately After The Tribulation: Heavenly Wonders

Jesus said: “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” (Matthew 24.29). These words most certainly grab the attention of the reader. It is in this verse that a person reading the chapter for the 1st time will think that Jesus is speaking about the actual end of the world. The immediate thought is that the world has to be on its last leg if both the sun & moon stop giving out light, stars start falling from heaven, & the heavenly powers start shaking. Because nothing of this sort has ever been known to happen before one automatically thinks the events described in the text surely must be applied to a future time. So, in my own sojourn in Bible reading this was my 1st impression. But then after I came to view the chapter as speaking about the 1st century A.D. events I really had a problem with the verse. I still tried every way I could think to separate this passage from verses preceding it that I felt referred to the historic desolations but I could not (& still cannot) get around the word “immediately.” That word connected the tribulation referred to in verse 21 that I believed had already taken place with the heavenly wonders that would occur “immediately after the tribulation of those days.” I also faced the Lord’s statement of verse 34 that “this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” I did come up with an answer that at least partially satisfied me regarding this latter verse. I reasoned that the term, “this generation” could still make sense if by “this” Jesus was talking about the generation off in the future that He had just before in His conversation been describing. In other words, it referred to this particular generation that would witness literally in the future His 2nd coming when He would raise the dead & rapture the living saints. At the time I did not know there was another view to take on verse 34. Many take the view the reference is to “this race”, not this generation. I know this now. Although, in my own mind I could resolve verse 34, I was still unable to resolve verse 29.

Here were the options I saw. One, the tribulation spoken of in the chapter had nothing at all to do with events that had already occurred. If this was the case, what about the fact Jesus was asked to talk about the destruction of the temple? Where could I separate that part of His words from the tribulation? If I could have answered this question I would have had no problem seeing that the heavenly wonders were still waiting a future time for fulfillment. However, I could never answer the question so I rejected this option. Two, the heavenly wonders did literally already take place. They just simply were not as earthshaking as one might initially think from the reading of the verse. After all, eclipses of both the sun & moon do darken them, & it is common to see “shooting stars”. The problem I had with this option is for these things to have had any significance at all to what Christ was foretelling about the desolations they would have had to take place right at the time. As far as I have been able to determine there were no significant eclipses of sun & moon that took place right at that time. I even wonder if it is in natural course possible to have an eclipse of the sun & of the moon in close time proximity. As far as shooting stars are concerned, they are so commonplace it is hard to imagine they would serve as signs of great things to come, unless, of course, they occurred in extraordinary numbers. As noted previously, there were reports of a comet, & a sword-like star at the time but this is nothing like a darkened sun or moon, or like stars falling from the sky. Since I could not find evidence of these things happening at the time of the destruction I also rejected this option. Three, the heavenly wonders are to be interpreted in a metaphorical way. I try as much as possible to refrain from spiritualizing scripture, but for the sake of giving what I believe to be the sense of the thrust of this chapter I find this to be my only alternative. For the sake of providing a literal interpretation to the course of the language of the chapter I feel I must view this verse in a non-literal way. That is to say, the sun & moon did not actually become dark,

stars did not literally fall from the skies, & heavenly powers were not literally experienced as shaking by the inhabitants of the earth at that time. These things may one day happen but they will not be a fulfillment to this particular verse.

I have read some of the metaphorical meanings of the text. The darkened sun is seen as the removal of the temple's glory or simply as the removal of the ecclesiastical Jewish order, the darkened moon is seen as the removal of the ceremonial aspects of the law or as the removal of what the Jews had still retained concerning their civil affairs. The fallen stars are seen as the fall of the Rabbis. I will not attempt to dwell on any of these interpretations. For my part I see the words reflecting the darkened state of the Jewish people. It expresses a gloomy time & compares to what is said in Ecclesiastes to the dreary time of old age: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain" (Ecclesiastes 12.1-2). Isaiah also described a woeful period that has some of these features: "Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it. And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness, and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof" (Isaiah 5.29-30). It is interesting to note that Luke expands the thought to include distress of nations, perplexity, the roaring of waves & sea, & "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21.25-26). The word that is used for "earth" in verse 25 need not be understood as the whole globe. According to Strong's Analytical Concordance the word can also refer to simply a country or a land. My view of the verse is that it is depicting the terrible state of mind of the Jews who did survive the terrible tribulation.

There is another part of verse 29 that must be considered: "and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." I believe this fits the picture of what is written in the 12th chapter of Hebrews. After speaking of the mount in which the Israelites came in the days of Moses that brought such terror to them (verses 18-21), the writer then told the then present Hebrew children: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, SIGNIFIETH THE REMOVING OF THOSE THINGS THAT ARE SHAKEN, AS OF THINGS THAT ARE MADE, THAT THOSE THINGS WHICH CANNOT BE SHAKEN MAY REMAIN. WHEREFORE WE RECEIVING A KINGDOM WHICH CANNOT BE MOVED, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire" (verses 22-29). In short, the writer transitioned from the old order of things to the new. There was shaking of both heaven & earth by the Lord's voice. The words are not to be interpreted in the absolutely literal sense but rather they are spoken to signify a present truth. The truth is, we are now in a new age. In the shaking some things were removed. They could not stand. What things were left were the things that could stand.

Some time back I was struck by what is recorded in Acts, chapter 21. I have reference to the record of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem. I will not quote the whole chapter from verse 17, but it should be read.

The Jewish believers were glad to hear the news about God's work among the Gentiles. Yet, they had a concern about other aspects of Paul's ministry. Notice what they told Paul: "Thou seest, brother, HOW MANY THOUSANDS OF JEWS THERE ARE WHICH BELIEVE; AND THEY ARE ZEALOUS OF THE LAW: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs" (verses 20-21). Therefore, they wanted their brethren to come together to hear Paul, & they wanted Paul to show his respect for the law by participating in the purification of those who had taken the (Nazarite) vow. This was to include an offering. He, along with the 4 who had taken the vow, "entered into the temple" (verse 26). As far as these Jewish believers were concerned the Gentile believers did not have to do all of the things the Jewish believers had to do. The Jewish believers still retained the law. They still considered themselves to be a sect within the framework of the Hebrew religion.

The Jewish believers are identified through verse 26. They sought no harm for Paul. What was spoken of further throughout the chapter identifies the unbelievers among the Jews who did seek to have Paul harmed. However, in one respect they were the same. They still wanted to retain the temple service. Think what it would be like if the temple continued to stand. There would be a Jewish division that wanted both Christ & the law & there would be a Gentile division that only wanted Christ. But the Lord had told His disciples, "there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10.16). Through the stroke of the temple's destruction it was made plain the religion of Christ was not a sect of Judaism; it was separate from it. With what Christ had foretold & with what the Hebrew writer had said, "the powers of the heavens shall be shaken". This signified the end of the world (age) as far as temple service was concerned. In the shaking, that part was removed.

I have read where some commentators have speculated the Jews will someday build another temple in Jerusalem & renew the temple service. I must always be on guard against saying what God will or will not do, but for my part, I have a hard time believing God will ever allow the temple to be rebuilt. I wonder if the Jews could ever reinstate a priesthood of Levites. But even if they could the offerings of the old order gave way & were typical of the eternal offering & priesthood of Jesus Christ. Why would He then allow the things that have been done away in Christ to start up again?

So, in the temple's destruction came the end of the age. The disciples had asked Jesus when the age would end.

X. Immediately After The Tribulation: Christ's Coming

If Jesus' words concerning the heavenly signs grab the attention of the reader His words concerning His coming most certainly will do the same. Christians are so filled with the expectation of His 2nd coming we are conditioned to think that everything spoken about His coming refers to the future promise of His return. Therefore, the initial impression will be, just as it was with me, that like verse 3 in Matthew's account, verses 27, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44, & 48 also refer to His 2nd coming. However, once I came to view the chapter to be the Lord's prophecy concerning the desolations upon the Jewish people in the 1st century A.D. I now interpret these verses to relate to His coming in judgment upon the nation that would not have Him to be its King.

Jesus had told the disciples that they should not believe those who claimed He would be found in the desert or secret chambers (verse 26). Rather, He said: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (verse 27). Adam Clarke made the point in his commentary on this passage that the Roman army actually went into Jerusalem from east to west in its striking force. The "carcase" of the next verse where "the eagles be gathered together" represented the Roman army being where the desolate nation of the Jews was to be found.

I find the wording of verse 30 to be quite interesting for a couple of reasons. 1st, reference is made to the "sign" of the appearing of the Son of Man in heaven. Except for when the disciples had asked the Lord for the sign of His coming this is the only time when Christ referred to it as a sign in Matthew's account. 2nd, the Lord referred to the perspective of non-believers: "and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and THEY shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Check it out. In all other places in this chapter Christ's prophecy had viewed the events from the standpoint of the disciples. He related what believers would see, what believers should do, & what believers could expect men to do to them. Even the warnings that are given in the latter part of the chapter are directed to the saints. He spoke of His coming from their vantage point. It would be Jesus' followers that would see Him. But in this one verse He spoke of the mourning tribes who would see Him coming.

I have wondered why this one verse is different from the others. I have come to a conclusion that satisfies me. I go back to Matthew, chapter 12. The scribes & Pharisees had asked for a sign. Christ referred to both the sign of Jonah, who, having been in the fish's belly for 3 days & nights represented Christ's death, burial, & resurrection. When the Lord had come to His own, the Jews "received him not" (John 1.11). There was one among them greater than Jonah, & one wiser than Solomon, & instead of embracing Him they sought His death. They were like the man who had wicked spirits enter into him so that his last state was worse than it was before. Could it now be that verse 30 spoke to the fact the mourning tribes who survived the tribulation now saw the fulfillment of the 2nd part of the sign by seeing that the Lord had come to them in His judgment? I even speculate here that these who mourned were among the "remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11.5). In other words, they were not converted until after the great tribulation. The reason why I suggest this is because they, as the disciples that the Lord referred to throughout the chapter, now also were reported to see Him "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". This sure was not & is not the state of mind of reprobate Israel. If they were able to see Christ today in His power & glory they would have turned to Him a long time ago. But the people generally still do not reckon this judgment as evidence they did not receive Him when He came the 1st time to them. They are looking for another Messiah. They are like Israel in the days of Amos. In those days the Lord had sent famine, blasting, mildew, the

palmerworm, pestilence, & their enemies upon them, but they never associated these afflictions with their transgressions. The Lord, therefore, told them: “yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (Amos 4.6-12).

I acknowledge that when the Lord ascended “a cloud received him out of” the disciples’ sight. I also acknowledge that these same disciples were told, “this same Jesus, which was taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1.9,11). Thus, it is logical to think that when verse 30 speaks of Him “coming in the clouds of heaven” it is referring to His 2nd coming. However, clouds also depict a very gloomy scene. Joel spoke of the day of the Lord that would bring trembling to the people of the land, & he described that day as “a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of CLOUDS and thick darkness” (Joel 2.1-2). Surely, clouds are a fitting way to describe how the Lord in judgment came upon the Jewish nation during the desolations they received at the hands of the Romans.

It should also be pointed out that the word for “earth” in verse 30 is from a Greek word that can be translated “country” or “land.” Therefore, all of the earth’s tribes need not to be understood as all of the inhabitants of the globe but rather to all of the people of the land of the Jews.

I will not venture to give an exposition of each of the verses in this chapter that speak of the Lord’s coming. There will be no good purpose in doing so. Because I see the thrust of this chapter relating to the judgment that came upon the Jews in the 1st century, because I can find no dividing point between this judgment & His literal 2nd coming, & because I cannot accept the conclusion this chapter can be interpreted in a two-fold sense, I can only see His coming as referring to His coming in wrath upon the Jews. I realize all who do not accept my conclusions will apply the verses to His 2nd coming. If I have not persuaded them by my arguments so far no further exposition on the other passages will convince them.

XI. Review Of Other Scriptures

Lest I should be accused of twisting verses 27, 30, & the others away from the meaning of His 2nd coming to something entirely different I would like to point out other places in the Bible where the Lord spoke prophetically about the desolations upon Jerusalem. Some of the language used in the descriptions of Matthew, chapter 24 is similar language to what is found in these other cites. Some of these other texts also speak of His coming within a context that makes it doubtful His 2nd coming is the intended meaning.

The 1st scripture to note is what Matthew provides concerning the sending out of Christ's apostles. Mark made minimal reference to the same thing. Luke provided a little more detail than Mark but not nearly as much as Matthew. In the 10th chapter of Matthew the disciples are named & specific instructions are given to them. Since Mark indicated these disciples were sent out "by two and two" (Mark 6.7), I'm sure that some of what the Lord told the disciples are to be understood as applying to their ministries prior to His departure into heaven. However, as He continued to speak to them, He spoke of a time beyond the immediate future. When He told them men "will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles" (verses 17-18) & so on, He is not speaking about the time they were sent out in twos. There is no indication in the Gospels these things happened to the disciples while Jesus was still with them on earth but there is plenty of evidence these things occurred to them after He went into heaven. A simple reading of the book of Acts provides the evidence. Then, in verse 23 He told the disciples: "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, YE SHALL NOT HAVE GONE OVER THE CITIES OF ISRAEL, TIL THE SON OF MAN BE COME." It should be hard to miss the point here. He spoke about His coming. It had nothing to do with His 2nd coming. It was a coming that was to take place while they were alive & still preaching in Israel. I submit that this coming refers to the same coming spoken of in the 24th chapter.

The 2nd scripture will simply be noted with little commentary. I have previously commented on it. It is Matthew 12.38-45. Not only did the Lord speak of the sign of Jonah, but He also spoke of the judgment that would come upon "THIS WICKED GENERATION". I submit the worse state of the Jews in that particular generation was in evidence by what happened to them when the Romans destroyed their city. As has already been observed the parables of Matthew 21.33-46 & 22.1-14 correspond to the same judgment.

The 3rd scripture is found in Matthew 16.24-28. Parallel scriptures are found in other Gospels: Mark 8.34-9.1 & Luke 9.23-27. Having laid before the disciples what was required to follow Him Jesus said: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. 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" (verses 27-28). It should be plain by the fact the Lord spoke of some of the people not tasting death until He came in His kingdom that His coming had nothing to do with His 2nd coming. A popular view of this text is that the reference to His coming was what is described in the 1st 9 verses of the next chapter. That is, the transfiguration of Christ. A few of the disciples were blessed to witness that event. I was 1st introduced to this interpretation back in the mid-1960s after reading a book by R.A. Torrey called "Difficulties In The Bible." For a while I considered it a plausible explanation to what Christ had said. After all it did fit into the fabric of the context. All 3 of the Gospels immediately

related the transfiguration after Christ spoke of His coming. I have since that time come to reject this explanation. But for the sake of argument let's consider for a moment that this is the correct meaning of Jesus' words. He had said He would "come in the glory of his Father". There can be no dispute He was glorified at that time. Peter, in relating what he saw, wrote: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (II Peter 1.16-18). There should be no doubt that Peter, one of the eyewitnesses, was writing about the transfiguration. Christ was seen in a glorious state at that time, & since it occurred shortly after He had spoken about His coming there definitely were people who had not died before they saw the event. However, if this is the case, why do people then insist that when Christ spoke of coming in power & glory in the 24th chapter it had to have reference to His 2nd coming? By holding the view they hold about His transfiguration they are acknowledging a situation in which very similar language was used that they confess had nothing to do with His return to earth. In essence, they are admitting there is precedence for a coming that does not relate to a literal 2nd coming.

Having advanced this line of reasoning for the sake of argument, I will now go to the context myself to explain why I think the transfiguration is not what Jesus had in mind. According to verse 27 His coming in His Father's glory with His angels was to be followed by Him rewarding every man according to his works. I can allow that those at the transfiguration could constitute as angels. If an angel is understood as a messenger, then, on the one hand, Moses & Elijah could be considered angels; &, on the other hand, the disciples who later gave testimony to the event could also be considered angels. But, unless I am wholly missing something I fail to see how in this event there was a reward given to every man according to his works. However, I can see this application if Christ is here foretelling what would befall the Jews in the 1st century A.D. Believers escaped the horrendous desolations but unbelievers did not. Therefore, I submit this is another case in which the Lord spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem.

The 4th scripture is found in Matthew 23.34-39. I also had briefly touched upon this scripture. Throughout this chapter there is a record of the series of woes the Lord pronounced upon the Jewish religious leaders. He then foretold how they would persecute the ones He would send (verses 34-35), & He said, "Verily, I say unto you, ALL THESE THINGS SHALL COME UPON THIS GENERATION" (verse 35). Then, He spoke of Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT UNTO YOU DESOLATE. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, BLESSED IS HE THAT COMETH IN THE NAME OF THE LORD" (verses 37-39). I believe Jesus here spoke of the destruction that would come upon Jerusalem in the 1st century A.D. But the main thing I want to take from this text is that to this day these people are still in a state of desolation. They have not, even to this day, seen Him in the destruction of the temple. The saints may have seen very clearly that He came upon them at that time, but the Jews still have not seen Him, & by the word of the Lord, they will not see Him until such time as they say, "blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". With developments in the Mid-East region of the world, including the re-creation of an Israeli state, there may be hope this time is soon coming, but it has not happened yet. The people have had continuing conflicts among the Gentiles. They passed a horrible time during the days of Nazi Germany. They may have great troubles yet. The fact the prophecy of Christ was accomplished in 70 A.D. in no

way denies the reality of the ongoing status of desolation. Consider it this way. On 11-22-63 President Kennedy died. This is an accomplished fact. Yet, the state of his deadness continues to this day & shall continue until the day he is brought forth out of the grave to stand before the living God. In the same way we should see the continuing state of the Jews' desolations. It had a beginning point but it has also an ongoing status.

The 5th scripture is found in Luke 17.20-37. Here, in these verses, Jesus responded to the Pharisees' question about the coming of the kingdom of God (verses 20-21), & He went on to say to His disciples many of the same things He said in Matthew, chapter 24. He told them they would desire to see one of His days but would not see it, & that they should not believe the cries of those who say, "See here; or see there" (verses 22-23). As in chapter 24, He compared His coming to the lightning (verse 24). He told them before this happened He must suffer at the hands of "THIS GENERATION" (verse 25). There probably is no question about what He meant by this generation here, is there? He then used the analogy of the days of Noah in the same way He spoke of those days in chapter 24, plus He added an account of how things were in Lot's days to show that life was lived normally up to the time of destruction (verses 25-29). Then He said: "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man IS REVEALED" (verse 30), & following that statement He gave the instructions: "In that day, he which shall be upon the house top, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back" (verse 31), citing the example of Lot's wife (verse 32). He also in this text spoke of ones being taken & others left, & of the body & eagles being gathered together (verses 34-37). In short, much of the language Jesus used in chapter 24 was language He used in a prior conversation with the disciples. I submit He is here also making the disciples aware of what will happen later in the 1st century A.D. But I can see someone questioning me about this. How do I know it has reference to the 1st century's destruction? How can I say it does not apply to a time that has not yet come? Well, here is my answer. Upon telling the disciples about the revealing of the Son of Man He told them that in that day they should apply the practical safety procedures if they were upon the house tops or in the fields. This reinforces the argument I have previously made. There is no point to such advise as this if it is the day of His 2nd coming. His instructions only make sense if there is a period they must wait out until things again return to normal. What Paul described concerning the literal coming of the Lord would not require a waiting out period. He spoke of the coming of the Lord, the resurrection of His dead saints, & the rapture of the living saints to be with the Lord (I Thessalonians 4.13-18). The description of His revealing does not fit the scenario of His 2nd coming but it does fit the scenario of what occurred in the 1st century A.D.

The 6th scripture is found in Luke 19.41-44. I will have to make very little comment on this text. Beside, The words should speak for themselves to show Christ is pointing to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D: "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee ONE STONE UPON ANOTHER; BECAUSE THOU KNEWEST NOT THE TIME OF THY VISITATION." Christ was their visitation.

So, it should be clear to anyone who reads the Gospels that there is an array of scriptures that speak of the days of the 1st century destruction, & with some of these words is language that speaks of His coming (or revealing). There is, therefore, no reason to think I am stretching scripture beyond its

bounds when I say the Bible refers to the events of 70 A.D. by speaking of a non-actual coming of the Lord.

XII. This Generation

I now want to return to the 24th chapter & look particularly at verse 34: “Verily I say unto you, THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS, TILL ALL THESE THINGS BE FULFILLED.” The certainty of Christ’s words is accented in the next verse: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” The initial impact of what Christ said is to cause a jolt in the thinking that this chapter details His 2nd coming. After all, if what He described would take place in the same generation He was speaking one would have to conclude He was not foretelling His 2nd coming. But I have since learned that those who hold the view this chapter does speak of His 2nd coming have a response to the initial impression of the verse. It is this. They point out the word for generation, “genea” in the Greek can be interpreted as a “race of people.” So, they point out the meaning of this verse is that the Jewish people will not pass away until all of the things foretold by Christ are accomplished. Providing those who take this view do not go beyond saying it can have this meaning I will have no dispute with them. If they say this is the only way to understand the word (or words stemming from it) I will challenge their statement. What they say is factually correct on two fronts. 1st, although it is not the primary use of the word, the word is sometimes used in this way. For example, this is how Paul used the word in Philippians 3.5 when he identified himself as one who was, “Circumcised the eighth day, of the STOCK of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews.” The word, “genos” (a form of genea) is the word translated “stock.” So, it is plain Paul was speaking about his nationality when he wrote those words. 2nd, it is also factually correct in that the scriptures show the Hebrew people will endure as a distinct people. This is true not only with respect to prophecies that have been fulfilled but also with respect to things that are ongoing or have not yet occurred. Despite the historic sufferings of the Jewish people it is an amazing tribute to the preservation of the Almighty that they continue to exist as a distinct nation. I only wish I had known during the earlier days of my studies that “genea” could be interpreted in this way. Back then verse 34 gave me fits. On the other hand, maybe it is a good thing I did not know the word could be understood as “a race.” If I did know this back then I may have satisfied myself that it meant this in verse 34.

The word “genea” is used 41 times in the New Testament. Of that number it is translated “generation” 36 times. Twice it is translated “age” & twice it is translated “time.” Once it is translated “nation.” I have reviewed the 36 verses in which our English translators gave the meaning to be “generation” & in no case could I find an instance in which I felt the word was used to mean anything but a time period. Other forms of the word were translated differently, but where they took the one word “genea” & translated it either in the singular or in plural as “generation” it always seemed to relate to time. For example, notice Matthew 1.17. There, four times the word is used referring to a specific time frame. Notice also Hebrews 3.10: “Wherefore I was grieved with that GENERATION.” There, the writer spoke of the Hebrew provocation in the days of Moses. I have brought to the attention of the reader six occasions where prior to the narrative of chapter 24 Christ foretold the desolations &/or His coming. He so worded His prophecies to lead the hearers to believe the occurrences were only a short time away. I, therefore, have no reason to believe we should understand verse 34 in any other way than a generation in which some alive at the time He spoke would still be alive to see these things accomplished. These other cites that place the happenings within the lifetime of some living in Christ’s sojourn on earth are quite consistent with what is said in verse 34.

XIII. Wrap Up Of The Chapter

There is no point in lingering at length on the rest of the chapter. The foundations were laid in the 1st part for my belief the 24th chapter deals exclusively with the events of the 1st century A.D. However, there are a few remarks I want to make.

I want to comment on verse 31: “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” The meaning of this verse is simple. Christ is telling the disciples His ministers will preach His Gospel throughout the world & gather in His elect. The meaning of the word “angel” is “a messenger.” Sometimes an angel is a member of the heavenly host; sometimes he is a man. The “angel Gabriel” was of the heavenly host, but the same Greek word, “angelos” is the word that is used to describe John the Baptist. The difference is that the translators took the Greek word & gave it the meaning “messenger” (Mark 1.2-4). As a matter of fact in every place where the word “angel” is used in the New Testament, except one, the Greek word is “angelos.” During the apostolic age preaching did go beyond the Jewish audience but it was not until after the destruction at Jerusalem that the religion of Christ became prominently a Gentile religion. The Lord previewed this after beholding the faith of the centurion when He said: “And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8.5-12). He also spoke of it when He commented on the parable of the householder who planted a vineyard. He applied the scripture to Himself: “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner” (Matthew 21.33-42); then in the next verse He said: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a NATION bringing forth the fruits thereof.” Should someone object “nation” is in the singular let it be noted Peter also used the singular when he wrote of those who “in time past were not a people, but now the people of God”, but he called them “an holy nation” (I Peter 2.9-10). This “holy nation” is composed of Gentiles as well as a remnant of Jews. I submit that God started this work among the elect Gentiles in the 1st century & that He spoke of it in this 24th chapter.

I also want to note that as He had done before (Luke 17.26-27) Jesus referred to the days of Noah to show the normalcy of the time in order to compare it to what was soon to take place before His coming in vengeance upon the Jews. The fact some in the field & at the mill would be taken while others would be left was fulfilled when the Romans killed or captured some of the Jews while others escaped this horrible fate (verses 37-41).

The parable of the fig tree was simply an alert to the fact the signs would be clear to the disciples when the nearness of the destruction would happen (verses 32-33). Yet, the specific moment would not be known in advance so the Lord provided various warnings to the disciples to be watchful (verses 36, & 42-51).

XIV. Back To The Book Of Daniel

The prophecies of Daniel, chapter 11 cover a great span of time. They begin with the reign of “Darius the Mede” (verse 1) & I frankly confess how far out in time they reach I am not enough of an expert in prophecy to be able to set forth a view. Different commentators have different opinions. Some may hold they have all been fulfilled now in time; others may hold there are still some parts waiting for fulfillment. This much I do hold. The prophecies do include again the time frame of the abomination of desolation (verse 31). The words of chapter 12, verse 1, “And at that time,” must take into account what had been written in chapter 11. That does not necessarily mean the last verse of chapter 11 becomes the most important verse in transition into the 12th chapter. The Hebrew word “al” has a wide range of usages. It not only can be translated “at”, but it can also be translated “concerning”, “throughout”, & “in (that)”. In other words the substance of what Daniel may be saying is simply “concerning that time.” Whatever the case, he then picked up the subject of the time of great trouble. It was that period of time he then immediately wrote about in the 1st verse.

After forming the basis of my beliefs concerning the 24th chapter of Matthew & the other chapters sometime in the early 1980s, I was still left with an unresolved problem. I could not figure out what to do with the 1st two verses of Daniel, chapter 12. There, in the 1st verse the prophet spoke of Michael. I understood Michael to be a reference to Christ. The Hebrew meaning of this name is “one like God.” Every indication in the verse is that Daniel is describing the Lord. He is the great prince, He stands for His people, & His people are delivered. His people are the ones whose names are written in the book. At this point I had no problem with the prophecy. Then, the problem started. It mentioned Him in connection with “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time.” So, linking scripture with scripture, I had to say this corresponded with what Christ had told His disciples about the time of the desolations upon the Jews. Again, Christ had said: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24.21). There would have been no problem with Daniel’s statement were it not for what he wrote in the next verse: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Oh boy! I did not know what to do with these two verses. I felt the prophet had linked the time of trouble with the time of the resurrection. If true, that would mean my views that the 24th chapter was exclusively about the 1st century A.D. desolations were wrong. I tried everything I could to reconcile the issue. I tried thinking that maybe there was a distinction to be made between “trouble” & “tribulation.” I really could find no legitimate difference between the two terms. For at least a good part of a decade the issue remained unresolved to me.

It is funny how simple conflicts can have such simple answers. By the same token it is a testimony to the work of the Spirit that what appears to be so complex can in just a moment’s time be resolved so easily. Sometime in the early 1990s my wife & I were entertaining an elder & his wife in our home. We were discussing these two passages in Daniel, & right at the moment that I was telling the elder I did not know what to do with them a “light bulb came on in my head.” The clouds gave way to enlightenment. I suddenly realized verse 1 spoke of one period & verse 2 spoke of another period. What Daniel was saying was the time of trouble when the Lord would deliver His people from the desolations was during one period but the resurrection he spoke of was to be during another period. The Lord provided for His believers so they were not hurt during the desolations upon Jerusalem but the further hope they had was that when they died they would be a part of the resurrection unto everlasting

life. This was so easy. No one should claim I am stretching a point here. What did Paul tell the Thessalonians: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” Tell me, was he not writing about those who already were in the earth’s dust? What hope did the apostle give to comfort the hearts of the then living saints? Was it not this? “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and THE DEAD IN CHRIST SHALL RISE FIRST” (I Thessalonians 4.13 & 16). Did these saints fall asleep in Christ at the same time they were to be resurrected? Of course not! They died many centuries ago & we are still waiting for them to come forth out of their graves. This same truth, so readily understood when it is read in other passages, is the same truth Daniel expressed prophetically with a more narrow focus upon those whom the Lord delivered at the time of the 1st century desolations. When I saw this, the final piece of the puzzle ended.

XV. Conclusion

I did not hastily enter into my views concerning these 3 chapters. As I have tried to explain throughout this writing they have been a part of my life during all the years of my Christian pilgrimage. I have spent long periods struggling over the meaning of these texts. I started out believing they solely spoke of the Lord's 2nd coming. Later, I tried to separate parts of the chapters into different event categories. It was not until into the early 1990s I could feel satisfied in saying these chapters do not deal with Christ's 2nd coming at all. I now feel comfortable in saying they deal completely with the 1st century A.D. desolations upon the Jews. I confess there will be a 2nd coming of the Lord. However, these chapters are not where one should go to find that doctrine presented.

It should be noted I have done very little spiritualizing of the scriptures in arriving at my conclusion. I have disrespect for those who spiritualize to the point where they spin the meaning of a verse to suit their own fancies. However, I have much respect for those who give serious analysis to the verses they are studying. So, I have tried to be analytical. To establish precedence, I have referred to passages outside of the 24th chapter that speak of the Lord's coming, but refer to something other than His 2nd coming. I have tried to be as literal in conveying the meaning of texts as I could possibly be. I have made use of the approaches I deem vital in giving the sense of the scripture. I have examined context. I have checked the meaning of Greek words. I have referred to other passages that I felt were relevant to the subject. And yes, I have tried to use common sense when interpreting the scriptures. Let the reader judge how fair I have been with the subject.

With these words I rest my case.

-David K. Mattingly