

~Fulfilled prophecies of Matthew 24~

Those who hold the FUTURIST interpretation commonly apply the verses about deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences, to our time, as things leading up to the tribulation period, which they believe will be, the last seven years of this age (after the rapture). The abomination of desolation is regarded as an idol of the Antichrist (or the Antichrist himself) which will be set up in the holy of holies of a rebuilt Jewish temple at Jerusalem. When this happens, according to this position, the Jews will flee into the mountains. From that time until Christ returns again (the second stage of the Second Coming) will be especially the great tribulation. This interpretation, of course, is the one which is taught by dispensationalists.

The FULFILLED interpretation, on the other hand, holds that the deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences were things which Jesus said would soon happen-things that would happen before the destruction of the temple. The abomination of desolation, by comparing the parallel accounts, is seen to refer to Gentile armies which would surround Jerusalem and bring the city to desolation. When these armies would be seen, the disciples of Christ were to flee from Jerusalem and Judea. What Jesus called "great tribulation" referred to the judgment that fell upon the Jewish nation, city and temple in 70 A. D.

Obviously the two interpretations-the FUTURIST and the FULFILLED-are far apart from each other. There are fine Christians on both sides. We feel, however, that many have accepted the futurist view only because they have not been fully aware of the historical evidence which shows that the prophecy **has been fulfilled**. The prophecy is recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. In order to get the full picture, all three of these parallel accounts will be considered.

The Statement of Jesus

Matthew: "And Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came to him for to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (24:1,2).

Mark: "And as he went out of the temple one of his disciples said unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, See thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (13:1,2).

Luke: "And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down" (21:5,6).

The Questions

Matthew: "WHEN shall these things be ?" (24:3).

Mark: "WHEN shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" (13:4).

Luke: "WHEN shall these things be ? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass" (21:1).

In addition to the questions about the destruction of the temple, Matthew's account records the question: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Mt. 24:3). We believe Jesus answered all of these questions-as we shall see. Nevertheless, the primary question-recorded by all the writers-was about the destruction of the temple. Jesus had said that one stone would not be left on another and the disciples asked: "When shall these things be ?"

Deceivers

Matthew: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you, For many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many" (24:4,5).

Mark: "And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you; For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many" (13:5,6).

Luke: "And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived; for many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ, and the time draws near; go ye not therefore after them" (21:8).

We notice that all three accounts warn about deceivers. But Luke's account explains WHEN these things would happen. Jesus said: "And the time **DRAWS NEAR**: go ye not therefore after them." Jesus was not talking about something that would take place hundreds or thousands of years later! Jesus was warning his disciples about something that was drawing near in their time! This is plain.

Did such deceivers or false Christs arise and deceive many in those years before the destruction of Jerusalem? Yes!

According to Josephus, the noted Jewish historian, twelve years after our Saviour's death, a certain impostor named **Theudas** persuaded a great multitude to follow him to the river Jordan which he claimed would divide for their passage. At the time of Felix (who is mentioned in the book of Acts), the country of the Jews was filled with impostors who Felix had put to death EVERY DAY-a statement which indicates that there were "many" of such in those days!

An Egyptian who "pretended to be a prophet" gathered 30,000 men, claiming that he would show "how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down."

Another deceiver was **Simon**, a sorcerer, who led people to believe he was the great power of God (**See Acts 8**). According to Irenaeus, Simon claimed to be the Son of God and creator of angels. Jerome says that he claimed to be the Word of God, the Almighty. Justin relates that he went to Rome and was acclaimed as a god by his magical powers.

Origen mentions a certain wonder-worker, **Dositheus**, who claimed he was the Christ foretold by Moses. Another deceiver in those days was **Barchochebas** who, according to Jerome, claimed to vomit flames. **Bar-jesus** is mentioned in Acts 13:6 as a sorcerer and false prophet. These are examples of the deceivers of whom history says there were "a great number," and of whom Jesus had prophesied that there would be "many."

Also, see my article "False Christs" on this site!

Wars and Rumors of Wars

Matthew: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom" (24:6,7).

Mark: "And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled; for such things must

needs be, but the end is not yet, For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (13:7, 8).

Luke: "But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified; for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by [immediately]. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom (21:9,10).

We are told that when Jesus gave this prophecy, the Roman Empire was experiencing a general peace within its borders. Jesus explained to his disciples that they would be hearing of wars, rumors of wars, and commotions. And did they? Yes! Within a short time the Empire was filled with strife, insurrection, and wars.

Before the fall of Jerusalem, four Emperors came to violent deaths within the space of 18 months.

According to the historian **Suetonius** (who lived during the latter part of the first century and the beginning of the second), Nero "drove a dagger into his throat." Galba was run down by horsemen. A soldier cut off his head and "thrusting his thumb into the mouth," carried the horrid trophy about. Otho "stabbed himself" in the breast. Vitellius was killed by slow torture and then "dragged by a hook into the Tiber." We can understand that such fate falling on the Emperors would naturally spread distress and insecurity through the Empire.

In the Annals of Tacitus, a Roman who wrote a history which covers the period prior to 70 A. D., we find such expressions as these: "*Disturbances in Germany,*" "*commotions in Africa,*" "*commotions in Thrace,*" "*insurrections in Gaul,*" "*intrigues among the Parthians,*" "*the war in Britain,*" "*war in Armenia.*"

Among the Jews, the times became turbulent. In **Seleucia**, 50,000 Jews were killed. There was an uprising against them in **Alexandria**. In a *battle between the Jews and Syrians in Caesarea*, 20,000 were killed. During these times, Caligula ordered his statue placed in the temple at Jerusalem. The Jews refused to do this and lived in constant fear that the Emperor's armies would be sent into Palestine. This fear became so real that some of them did not even bother to till their fields.

But though there would be wars, rumours of wars, and commotions, Jesus told his disciples: "See that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the END is not yet." The word "end" that is used here is not the same Greek word as in the expression "end of the world." (See footnote). As Barnes says, the end here referred to is "the end of the Jewish economy; the destruction of Jerusalem."

Wars, rumors of wars, and commotions were of a general nature. These things were not signs of the end; to the contrary, they were given to show that the end was NOT yet! None of these things would be the sign which would cause the disciples to flee into the mountains.

Famines, Pestilences, Earthquakes

Matthew. "And there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places, all these are the beginning of sorrows (24:7,8).

Mark: "And there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles. These are the beginning of sorrows" (13:8).

Luke: "And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines and pestilences, and fearful sights" (21:11).

The Bible records that there was famine "throughout all the world...in the days of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:28). Judea was especially hard hit by famine. "The disciples, every man according to his ability,

determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" (verse 29). Paul's instructions concerning this "collection [of fruit] for the saints" is recorded in First Corinthians 16:1-5; Rom. 15:25-28.

Historians such as Suetonius and others **mention famine** during those years. Tacitus speaks of a "*failure in the crops, and a famine consequent thereupon.*" Eusebius also mentions **famines** during this time in **Rome, Judea, and Greece**. Yes, there were famines in those years before the fall of Jerusalem.

Along with famines, Jesus mentioned **pestilence**; that is, plagues, the spread of disease, epidemics. Famine and pestilence, of course, go hand in hand. When people do not have proper food or insufficient food, pestilence results. Suetonius wrote of "*pestilence*" **at Rome** in the days of Nero which was so severe that "within the space of one autumn there died no less than 30,000 persons." Josephus records that **pestilences** raged in **Babylonia** in A. D. 40. Tacitus tells of **pestilences** in **Italy** in A. D. 65. Yes, there were pestilences in those years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

During this period, Jesus said there would also be **earthquakes** in many places. Tacitus mentions **earthquakes at Rome**. He wrote that "**Frequent earthquakes occurred**, by which many houses were thrown down" and that "*twelve populous cities of Asia fell in ruins from an earthquake.*"

Seneca, writing in the year 58 A. D. **regarding earthquakes**, said: "*How often have cities of Asia and Achaea fallen with one fatal shock! how many cities have been swallowed up in Syria! how many in Macedonia! how often has Cyprus been wasted by this calamity! how often has Paphos become a ruin! News has often been brought us of the demolition of whole cities at once.*" He mentions the **earthquake at Campania** during the reign of Nero. In 60 A.D., Hierapous, Colosse, and Laodicea were overthrown- Laodicea being so self-sufficient that it recovered without the Imperial aid furnished other cities. In 63 A.D., the city of Pompeii was greatly damaged by earthquake. There were **earthquakes in Crete, Apamea, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, and Judea**. Earthquakes in divers places!

Persecution Against the Disciples

Matthew: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.., And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (24:9-12).

Mark: "They shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten; and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony... whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak but the Holy Ghost... And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (13:9-13).

Luke: "They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony...I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist...and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (21:12-17).

The book of Acts gives a complete account of how the disciples were persecuted in the very ways Jesus had predicted. Let us take, for example, Acts 4: "And they laid hands on them [Peter and John], and put them in prison" (verse 3). They were brought before "rulers" (verses 5-7). And it turned into an opportunity to testify. Peter explained that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (verse 12). They were given a mouth of wisdom which their adversaries could not gainsay, for the men of the council "marveled" (verse 13). They were then commanded "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (verse 18). As Jesus had said, they were hated for his name's

sake!

The same things are seen in Acts 5. **Certain authorities** "laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison" (verse 18). Later they were brought "before the council" (verse 27) and told to answer for continuing to teach in the name of Jesus (verse 28). Again they had opportunity to testify (verses 29-32). They were "beaten" (verse 40). As they departed from the "council", they rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name" (verse 41).

Or take Acts 6. There arose **certain ones of the "synagogue"** that disputed with Steven. "And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke" (verses 9,10). Persecution resulted and he was brought into the "council" and questioned (verse 12). Again there was the opportunity to testify, the words of that testimony being given in Acts 7. Steven was killed for his stand (verses 54-60). Jesus had said that some of them would be killed.

Notice Acts 8. "There was a great persecution against the church." Christians were put in "prison", but the result was that the word was preached (verses 1-4).

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were beaten and cast into "prison." But it turned into an opportunity to testify and the Philippian jailor and his family were converted as a result (verses 22-34). In Acts 21, persecution resulted in Paul being beaten, brought before rulers, before whom he testified (Acts 22). In Acts 22:19 we read that Christians were "imprisoned and beat in every Synagogue."

In Acts 24, Paul was brought before Felix, the governor, and testified. He was given a mouth of wisdom which his adversaries could not gainsay-though they obtained an orator to speak against him. Paul's words even made **Felix** to "tremble." In Acts 25 and 26, Paul was brought before king **Agrippa**, the chief captains, and the principal men of the city. He was given a mouth of wisdom, for Agrippa said to Paul, "Almost thou persuades me to be a Christian" (verse 28).

Jesus said the disciples would be afflicted, beaten, imprisoned; they would be hated for his name's sake and some would be killed; they would be brought before councils, rulers, and kings, for a testimony; they would be given a mouth of wisdom which their adversaries could not gainsay. Surely these things came to pass in those years-unmistakably fulfilled in every detail!

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many ...but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Mt. 24:11,13). Peter, who was present when Jesus gave this prophecy (Mk. 13:3), later wrote about "false prophets" that had risen and of "many" that followed their pernicious ways (2 Peter 2). John, who also heard Jesus give this prophecy, recorded the fulfillment: "Many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). "Many deceivers are entered into the world" (2 John 7).

Paul also spoke of "false apostles, deceitful workers" (2 Cor. 11:13). He mentioned Hymenaeus and Philetus who taught false doctrines and overthrew the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17, 18). By the time of his epistle to Titus, there were "many...deceivers ...who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not" (Titus 1:10, 11).

The waters of truth were muddied by betrayals, false prophets, iniquity, and the love of many waxing cold. "But he that shall endure [such things] until the end, the same shall be saved" (Mt. 24:13)-both now and hereafter. We understand "end" here in a general sense, for unlike the use of this word in verses 6 and 14, this reference does not have the definite article in the Greek text.

Gospel To Be Preached To All Nations

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then [not until then] shall the end come" (Mt. 24:14). Unless we take this verse clear out of its setting, "the end" in view here is the end or destruction which was to come upon Jerusalem and the temple. (See footnote.) This was the question that Jesus was answering in the verses before, and the verses that follow are still speaking about Jerusalem and Judea. Jerusalem would be destroyed, but "first" the gospel would be preached unto all nations (Mk. 13:10).

It was a tremendous prophecy. Picture the scene. Here on the mount of Olives, Jesus was speaking these words to seemingly insignificant men. Who would have supposed that the names of these humble men would become known around the world and that even in our day-almost 2,100 years later-the seeds of truth that they planted would still be producing fruit? Who would have supposed that this unpopular gospel that Christ committed to these men would ever spread beyond that immediate area? Such a vast preaching program unto all nations seemed almost impossible of fulfillment. But it was fulfilled, and in a very real sense the gospel did go to all nations before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D.!

On the day of Pentecost when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, there were present in Jerusalem "devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). They heard the gospel preached by Peter and 3,000 were converted that day. Many of these, no doubt, returned to their various countries and preached the gospel.

Later when persecution came against the church, the believers at Jerusalem were scattered and "went every where preaching the word", throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1,4). Philip took the message to the city of Samaria with great results (verses 5-8). Later he was directed to a high ranking government official from Ethiopia who was gloriously converted (verses 26-40). It is believed that this man took the message to the continent of Africa and many were converted because of his influential testimony.

Peter took the message to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, an event that was a turning point in the missionary activities of the church (Acts 10, 11). The book of Acts gives a sketch of the mighty missionary work that advanced rapidly.

The message spread to Rome. By the time of Nero, the Christians had grown so numerous that they aroused the jealousy of the government. The story of the great fire in Rome in 64 A. D. for which the Christians were falsely blamed-is well known. In writing to the Christians at Rome, Paul opens his epistle by saying, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:8), and his closing words talk about the gospel as having been "made known to all nations for the obedience of faith" (16:26).

Concerning even far away England, **Newton says:** "There is absolute certainty that Christianity was planted in this country in the days of the apostles, before the destruction of Jerusalem." **Eusebius** and also **Theodoret** inform us that the apostles preached the gospel in all the world and some of them "passed beyond the ocean to the Britannic isles."

By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, he could say: "The gospel...is come unto you, as it is in all the world" (Col. 1:6). Likewise, in verse 23, he mentions "'the gospel which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven."

By 70 A. D., the gospel had gone forth to the world for a witness. No longer was God's message to man confined to one nation!