

Matthew 24-25: Destruction of Jerusalem vs. Final Judgment

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And when he drew nigh, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, when thine enemies shall cast up a bank about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall dash thee to 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. (Jesus, as He approached Jerusalem the last week of His life, [Lk. 19.41-44.](#))

This study examines one of the most difficult, perplexing, abused, and misapplied passages of scripture in all the Bible, the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. As one of the most difficult, it suffers the most speculative interpretations, and many religious leaders base their false doctrines upon it. For example, this chapter is the starting place for many false teachings propagated today about a final return of Christ. It is also the favorite ground of many who hold to false theories about the Kingdom of Christ. The Worldwide Church of God, founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, and Jehovah's Witnesses use the passage to substantiate their teachings about their organization and a final coming of Christ. Misuse of it is also the basis for Hal Lindsay's popular *Late Great Planet Earth*.

Matthew 24 has also suffered at the hands of liberal theologians, who think Jesus taught the imminence of His return at the end of time. One modernist, David Strauss, summed the matter up this way:

Jesus at first speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem and farther on, and until the close, of his return at the end of all things, and that he places the two events in immediate connection." (David Strauss, *Life of Jesus, Vol. III*, as cited by J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948, p. vii.)

From this viewpoint of the chapter, Strauss came to the same conclusion many theologians of our time have, which is that the "announcement of Jesus appears so far to have been erroneous" (*Ibid.*, p. 85). Another modernist, C. C. McCown wrote:

Either Jesus is mistaken or these discourses are not from him. The Christian church cannot without disloyalty escape this dilemma. (C. C. McCown, *The Search for the Real Jesus*, pp. 243-244, cited by Kik, *Ibid.*)

That Jesus made a mistake about His return is a serious charge. Thus, in this study, we want to examine the background of the passage, and the questions the apostles asked Jesus on this occasion. Finally, we will look at the teachings contained in Jesus' answer. In this way, we can understand the passage just like the apostles and first-century Christians did.

Background of Matthew 24

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 took place in the last two to three days of His life. He had returned to Jerusalem for the last time before His death and, in chapter 23, Jesus had just completely denounced the religious leadership of the Jewish nation. In verses 13-16, 23, 25, 27, 29, Jesus pronounced various woes upon these hypocritical Jewish teachers. He called them fools, blind guides, offspring of vipers, etc. In verses 38-39, Jesus stood in the temple in Jerusalem and made the statement, "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." With those words, He walked from the temple, having pronounced it not God's house, but strictly as the religious operation of those tradition-bound Jewish leaders. In chapter 24, as Jesus and His apostles walked out of the temple, the conversation of interest in this study occurs.

A Review of Views of Matthew 24

Before we study the chapter itself, it would be well to look at the various views taken by those in the religious world about this controversial chapter. Most view it as composed of two subjects, the destruction of Jerusalem and a return of Christ at the end of time. The most popular position is the "verse 36 position," which applies everything in the first thirty-five verses of Matthew 24 to the destruction of Jerusalem. Then, verses 36 through 44 apply to the final return of Christ.

The second most popular view is the "verse 29 position." Many read verse 29 and 30 (where Jesus spoke of the sun darkened, the moon with no light, and the stars fallen from heaven), and feel those verses can't possibly have been fulfilled. Thus, they think the break between the two subjects takes place at that point.

Another popular position is the "oscillating position." Those who hold it believe that Jesus switched back and forth between the subjects of the destruction of Jerusalem and His final return. Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology*, referred to Mt. 24:5-14, 21, 22, 29-31 as a description of events which must take place shortly before a final return of Christ. Thus, the interceding verses refer to the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Position Which Will Be Set Forth Here

The position which will be set forth herein is that Matthew 24 does *not* deal with two subjects at all, but is, in its entirety, concerned with the destruction of

Jerusalem. Thus, no transition occurred anywhere in the chapter where Jesus began to speak about a coming at the end of time. It is our responsibility in the remainder of this study to present those evidences from the Bible which show that the apostles did not ask Jesus about a final return, and that Jesus didn't deal with that subject.

Analysis of the Apostles' Questions

Mt. 24.1-3 gives the most complete account of the questions of the apostles as they walked with Jesus out of the temple after His denunciation of the religious leadership of the Jews:

And Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way; and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered and 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. And as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world.

Of course, understanding the apostles' questions is important to understanding Jesus' answer. The teaching of Matthew 24 is plainly in response to their questions. A comparison of the three gospel accounts aids this understanding:

Mk. 13.4 . . . Tell us, when shall these things be . . . ?

Lk. 21.7 . . . Teacher, when therefore shall these things be?

Mt. 24.3 . . . Tell us, when shall these things be . . . ?

In the first question that the apostles asked in all three accounts, "these things" referred to the same things Jesus had just told the apostles about. This was the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (See Mt. 24.2, "See ye not all these things?" and Mt. 24.34, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.")

As we compare the second part of their questions, we find:

Mk. 13.4. . . and what shall be the sign when these things are all about to be accomplished?

Lk. 21.7. . . and what shall be the sign when these things are about to come to pass?

Mt. 24.3. . . and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Notice carefully two facts about the apostles' questions. First, in all three accounts, the apostles asked for two things, (1) a time, and (2) a sign. Now see the five-fold use of the expression "these things" in the three accounts. All agree

that in the first question, this expression referred to the destruction of Jerusalem. Grammar demands that the same expression referred to the same things in the second part of their questions. Observe also that in Mark's and Luke's accounts, the second part of their question concerned "the sign when these things" were about to be fulfilled. Obviously, the sign when Christ would fulfill these things had to refer to the same things alluded to in the earlier question, the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, the sign that concerned the apostles was about the destruction of Jerusalem. Since the apostles asked for one sign, the sign about which they asked in Mt. 24.3 must be the same sign as recorded in Mark and Luke. Our contention is that Jesus used "these things" consistently five times to denote the destruction of Jerusalem and that the sign they asked about was about these same things.

Notice, were it not for Matthew's account of the apostles' questions, no idea of a final return of Christ and the end of time would enter our minds. However, Matthew's account used the expressions "coming" and "end of the world" which may suggest a final return to some. An examination of other passages where Bible writers use these same expressions will lead us to perhaps a different conclusion.

For example, Heb. 9.26 used the same expression, when the Hebrew writer said:

else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the *end of the ages* [emphasis mine?SGD] hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

The expression "at the end of the ages," which referred to the first coming of Christ, comes from the same Greek expression used in Mt. 24.3. It means, literally, "the consummation of the age." Christ was offered at His first coming as the completion or consummation of the plan of God to redeem humanity.

Second, Paul used the same expression in I Cor. 10.11. He spoke of the value of the Old Testament scriptures to New Testament Christians:

Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.

Again, the expression referred not to a final return of Christ but to the age in which we now live since the first coming of Christ. Thus, the age they asked about in Mt. 24.3 was the age when "these things" would occur. Later in the discourse, we'll see that Jesus said "this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished" (Mt. 24.34). He gave these warnings, "that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21.36).

Since the language of the apostles' questions didn't demand that they asked about a final return of Christ, we now want to see that *the apostles wouldn't have asked about a final return of Christ because, at that time, they didn't believe Jesus planned to go away.*

As we noted earlier, the apostles asked these questions in the last week of Jesus' life. At that time, they didn't have all the truth. In Jn. 16.12, spoken only a few days after Matthew 24, Jesus told the apostles: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." As we are about to show in detail, the apostles could not have asked about a final return because, at that time, they didn't even believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

We now want to discuss in chronological order several passages which show the improbability that the apostles asked Jesus about a final return in Mt. 24.3:

1. Matthew 24: As noticed earlier in this material, this discussion between Jesus and His apostles occurred two or three days before His death.

Passages Which Occur Chronologically Before Matthew 24

2. Mt. 16.21, 22: From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee.

In this passage, spoken at least six months before Jesus died, Jesus plainly told His disciples He would die and be resurrected. As Peter's response shows, they did not realize the significance of Jesus' teaching, and weren't aware of a final return at that time. They did not expect Jesus to go away. At that time, they still expected Jesus to set up a physical kingdom, as the following passage shows:

3. Mt. 20.20-22: Then came to him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, worshiping him, and asking a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wouldest thou? She saith unto him, Command that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask.

This passage illustrates again that the apostles and the other disciples didn't realize Jesus wouldn't set up a physical kingdom on the earth. Nor did they realize He would die, be resurrected, and go back to heaven. This shows they would not have asked about a final return at this interval shortly before Matthew 24.

4. Lk. 18.31-34, 19.11: And he took unto him the twelve; and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written

through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man, for he shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon: and they shall scourge and kill him: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said.

As Jesus and the apostles approached the city of Jerusalem in this same context (Lk. 19.11):

And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear.

Both these passages show that within one week of the time of the Matthew 24 discourse, the apostles still believed Jesus would set up a physical kingdom with its headquarters in Jerusalem. They did not believe He would go away. They did not believe in a final return just a few days before they questioned Jesus in Mt. 24.3.

Passages Which Occur Chronologically after Matthew 24

5. Jn. 14.1-3; 16.16-18: In the first of these passages, spoken the night before Jesus was put to death, Jesus told the apostles:

Let not your heart be troubled: 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: for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

Here, Jesus plainly told the apostles that it was necessary for Him to go away. They resolutely refused to believe it, because this teaching did not fit with their idea of the kingdom. This is especially evident in the following passage, which was spoken on the same night, the night before Jesus was crucified:

7. Jn. 16.16-18: Jesus said to the apostles: . . . A little while, and ye behold me no more; and again a little while, and ye shall see me. Some of his disciples therefore said one to another, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall see me; and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? We know not what he saith.

Thus, Jesus plainly told them the absolute necessity of His death, burial, and resurrection. We have the testimony of the apostles themselves that they didn't know what He was talking about. They didn't expect Jesus to go away the night

before He died. They would not have asked about a final return which they, at that time, didn't believe in.

These passages of scripture show conclusively that both shortly *before* Matthew 24 took place and shortly *after* Matthew 24 took place, the apostles didn't expect Jesus to go away. Therefore, they didn't understand anything about a final return. Because of this, they would not have asked about a final return *in* Matthew 24.

Three other passages show this even further:

6. Jn. 20.9: This passage relates the discovery of the empty tomb by Peter and John on the day of Jesus' resurrection:

For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must arise again from the dead.

Though Jesus had taught the apostles that He would die, be resurrected, and go back to the father, they still didn't believe it. This was the very day of His resurrection.

7. Lk. 24.21: On the day Jesus was raised from the dead, the two disciples who didn't recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus talked with Him, and said:

But we hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel. Yea and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass.

These two had lost hope that Jesus was the Messiah and now looked elsewhere for their Messiah. Jesus reproved them in vv25-27:

. . . O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

8. Ac. 1.6: Forty days after the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles still didn't visualize Jesus' departure and ascension back to heaven:

They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

Again, this question by the apostles shows that even on the day of the ascension of Christ, they still expected Him to set up a physical kingdom on the earth.

Because of these considerations, the statement of Hal Lindsay in his popular *Late Great Planet Earth*, a shallow presentation of premillennial doctrines and a

perversion based upon Matthew 24, appears absurd in the extreme. Of the questions asked by the apostles, Lindsay said:

The "coming" referred to in the question above is commonly referred to as the second advent of Christ. *It was only natural that they wanted to know what signs would indicate his return to set up God's promised kingdom* [emphasis mine?SGD]. (Hal Lindsay, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970, p. 52.)

Thus, we not only see that the language of the questions doesn't demand that they asked about a final return, but the apostles' knowledge at that time demands that they did not ask about one. They simply didn't believe Jesus was about to go away!

We now want to see that Jesus' answer doesn't demand that He talked about a final return. This lends evidence to the position that the entire chapter of Matthew 24 deals with the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70.

A Brief Commentary on Matthew 24.4-44

Verses 4-5: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray."

These verses were abundantly fulfilled at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. The Jewish historian Josephus (*Wars*, VI, 5, 2) testified that the land was overrun with magicians, seducers, and impostors, who drew the people after them in multitudes into solitudes and deserts, to see the signs and miracles which they promised to show by the power of God.

Verses 6-8: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for these things must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail."

The history of Rome records the most violent agitations prevailed in the Roman empire previous to the destruction of Jerusalem. Four emperors: Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius suffered violent deaths, in the short space of eighteen months. Josephus (*Wars*, IV, 9, 2) said that Bardanes, and after him Volageses, declared war against the Jews, but it was not executed. He also said that Vitellius, governor of Syria, declared war against Aretas, king of Arabia, and wished to lead his army through Palestine, but the death of Tiberius prevented the war.

Verses 9-10: "Then shall they deliver you up into tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another."

This teaching parallels that of Jesus in Jn. 15.20, 21 when He said to the apostles: "Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not great than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me."

Verse 11: "And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray."

Josephus, in his history of the destruction of Jerusalem, gave this account:

Now, there was then a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people, who denounced this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God; and this was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes. (Flavius Josephus, *Complete Works*, VI, 5, 2, Translated by William Whiston, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960, p. 582.)

This direct historical account shows the fulfillment of Jesus' statement about the destruction of Jerusalem.

Verses 12-14: "And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come."

This statement of Jesus about the preaching of the gospel is sometimes controversial, but whatever Jesus included in this prophecy is seen to be abundantly fulfilled in Ac. 2.5:

Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.

Also, in Rom. 1.8, Paul used similar language to speak of the faith of the Romans:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world.

As he spoke specifically of the preaching of the gospel, Paul said in Col. 1.5, 6, 23: ". . . the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you; even as it is also in all

the world, bearing fruit and increasing . . . continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven . . . "

Paul wrote the Colossian letter in 62 A.D., a full eight years before the destruction of Jerusalem, in obvious fulfillment of the statement of Jesus in Mt. 24.14.

Verses 15-16: "When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (Let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains."

This was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. When the Romans entered the city of Jerusalem, their pagan soldiers entered into the temple (which defiled it according to the Old Testament law) and hauled down the Jewish ornaments and temple accoutrements. Josephus (*Wars*, VI, 6, 1, p. 583.) relates how they raised in their place the pagan symbols and Roman standards. The abomination of desolation took place when the Romans placed their standards and pagan symbols in the holy place.

Verses 17-20: "Let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath"

Jesus continued His warnings to flee the physical destruction, and this would have no application to a final return of Christ. Christians were to watch for these signs so they would know when to "flee to the mountains." They were to pray that they wouldn't have to flee on the sabbath or in the winter. Winter's extremes would hinder their flight, as also would a sabbath day, because of the locked gates of all the walled cities in Judea on the sabbath (See Neh. 13.19 for an example).

The argument sabbatarians today make on this passage is simply ludicrous. They hold that if the Romans broke into Jerusalem on the sabbath, Christians would keep the sabbath, and would have to stay right there because it was the sabbath.

First, if this verse proves the sabbath was a holy day to Christians in New Testament times, then it would prove winter was a holy season. Thus, this verse proves nothing about Christians keeping the sabbath. Second, in Mt. 12.11, Jesus disclosed that one could get his sheep out of danger on the sabbath, and in verse 12 declared: "How much then is a man of more value than a sheep!" The

argument of the sabbatarians makes man of less value than a sheep, if they use Mt. 24.20 to prove the faithful could not leave the besieged city on the sabbath.

Verses 21-22: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

We also find historical testimony of the fulfillment of this prophecy in Josephus, who was present at the time, and who uses nearly the exact words of Jesus:

Accordingly it appears to me, that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were . . . (Josephus, *Wars*, Preface, 4, p. 428.)

Further, Josephus said that during the siege's grip, when no grain was left, wholesale destruction took place within the walls of Jerusalem. Food was so short that any locked door meant someone had food inside. Marauders would break down the doors, rush in, and grab the throats of those inside, hoping to squeeze a morsel of food from their throats. Whole families perished during the siege. Tomb-robbing was rampant. Josephus mentioned he saw 600,000 bodies thrown out the gates of the city. The Romans caught one deserter with gold he swallowed to smuggle out of the city. They suspected that many Jews attempted this. In one night the Romans killed 2000 Jews and ripped open their stomachs. Josephus told of one mother who was so hungry she roasted her infant son and ate half of him, and offered the other half to her neighbor.

In short, nothing in history matches the violence, savageness, famine, pestilence, and despair present in the siege of Jerusalem. It was the blackest and cruelest war in the annals of humanity, yet for those who were watchful, a way of escape existed. The Roman general Vespasian, who began the siege of Jerusalem, heard of the political tumult in Rome and returned to Rome to become the new emperor. He then sent his son, Titus, back to Jerusalem to finish the siege. During the lull in the siege, Christians alert to the warnings of Christ fled the city. Truly, as Jesus said, except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but for the elect's sake those days were shortened.

Verses 23-26: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Here; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you before hand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe it not."

These are repetitions of earlier warnings against false Christs. See the reference to verse 11 for the historical fulfillment of these statements during the siege of Jerusalem.

Verses 27-28: "For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

Taken by itself, some might use this verse to refer to a final return of Christ. Since the apostles did not ask Him about it and the entire context speaks of the physical judgment Christ would bring upon the city of Jerusalem, "coming" refers to His presence in the form of the Roman army. The Jewish nation was the carcase which Christ sent the Roman eagles to devour.

Verse 29: "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall 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."

Many times when we read this verse, someone says, "Surely the world has never seen anything like this," to which we answer, "Certainly we have!" In many cases in the Bible, speakers of inspiration have used these same phrases to describe a physical judgment God would bring against a city or nation.

For example, in Isa. 13.10, God said of Babylon: For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in its going forth, and the moon shall not cause its light to shine.

Has this prophecy of punishment been fulfilled against Babylon? It has, for that nation no longer even exists. This example illustrates God's use of "judgment language" to describe Babylon's dark day. In the same chapter, in verse 13, God said:

Therefore I will make the heavens to tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of its place, in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

In verses 19-20, He said: And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there.

In Babylon's case, the stars have ceased to give their light, the sun has been darkened, the moon is not causing its light to shine. The heavens have trembled, because God has carried out the judgment He spoke against them.

In Isa. 34.4, 5, God spoke of the destruction of Edom in similar language: And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all their host shall fade away, as the leaf fadeth from off the vine, and as a fading leaf from the fig-tree. For my sword hath drunk its fill in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Edom, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment.

Has this statement been fulfilled? God carried out this judgment of Edom. It is no more!

Similar examples of this type of language which have been fulfilled are Amos 8.9, where Amos prophesied the destruction of Samaria. See Ezek. 32.7, 8, where Ezekiel foretold judgment against Egypt, and Jer. 4.23, 24, 27, 28, where Jeremiah revealed Judah's punishment at the hand of the Babylonians.

These passages illustrate the meaning of the same type of language Jesus used in Mt. 24.29. When some say, "Surely the world has never seen such," they simply are not aware of the way the Bible uses this type of language in reference to physical judgments which God carried out in the past, with no reference to a final return of Christ at all.

Verses 30-31: "and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send forth 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."

Before we consider the meaning of these words in detail, let us make this observation. Even if we did not understand their meaning, another consideration arises which would lead us to the conclusion that Christ fulfilled them in the destruction of Jerusalem. In verse 34, Jesus made the statement:

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.

This is a most important consideration. If Jesus didn't fulfill all these prophecies during the generation to whom He was speaking, then Jesus Himself was mistaken on the subject and doesn't deserve to be believed.

Some object that the word "generation" doesn't refer to the group of people who lived just at the time Jesus spoke these words. They suggest the idea that "race," "nation," or "Israel," replaces that of a contemporary generation. It is a belief without warrant. The word "generation" in the Bible doesn't mean "nation," "race," or "mankind," but always means a group of people who live contemporaneously.

To show this, Matthew used the word "generation" 10 other times in the book of Matthew (1.17, 3.7, 11.16, 12.39, 12.41, 42, 45, 16.4, 17.17, and 23.36). The word always referred to a group of people who lived at the same time. Notice especially the following:

Mt. 1.17: So all the generations from Abraham unto David are fourteen *generations* . . .

Mt. 11.16: But whereunto shall I liken this *generation*? . . .

Mt. 12.41: The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this *generation* . . .

Mt. 12.42: The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this *generation* . . .

Mt. 23.36: Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this *generation*.

In all these examples, as in all the rest, Jesus did not speak of anything other than what we mean when we use the term "generation." The term "generation," or "this generation" means *the same thing in Mt. 24.34* as it does in *every other occurrence in Matthew's gospel. This includes the word "generation" Jesus used earlier in this same conversation in Mt. 23.36 which has the same meaning as "generation" in Mt. 24.34.* All the things Jesus foretold would occur during the lifetime of His contemporaries. Thus, whether we or anyone else understand the teaching of verses 29-31, we can agree that whatever Jesus talked about, He fulfilled it in the generation He spoke to.

Now, in verse 30, when Jesus spoke about the appearance of the sign of the Son of man in heaven, He spoke about a *sign which would show that the Son of man was in heaven.* For instance, Jesus gave the apostles a similar sign in John 14. There He promised the apostles He would go back to heaven, and would send the Holy Spirit to guide them into all the truth. When the apostles received all the truth, it was a sign that Jesus was in heaven. Even though the apostles hadn't seen Him sit down at the right hand of God, Peter stated in Ac. 2.33:

Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear.

Peter argued that since the Holy Spirit had come as promised to the apostles, they knew Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God. To further illustrate, suppose a local politician campaigned to you that if you elected him, he would see that your local water tower got painted bright orange. Suppose, further, that the next time you saw the water tower, it was bright orange. What do you know has happened even if you don't know the outcome of the election directly? You know the orange water tower is a sign of his election.

Similarly, when Jesus came in judgment on the city of Jerusalem, it was another sign that He was in heaven. Jesus told Caiaphas, the High Priest, the same thing in Mt. 26.64, the night of the betrayal:

. . . Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Did Caiaphas see this or not? Certainly he did, when Jesus sent the Roman armies to destroy the city of Jerusalem! At that time, Caiaphas, who was familiar with the judgment language of the Old Testament, would have to realize that it had come to pass just as Jesus warned it would.

The Significance of Coming on the Clouds of Heaven

Some may object that Jesus never came on the clouds of heaven, and that this language can apply only to a final return. Yet, the Bible speaks many times of divine beings "coming on the clouds of heaven," in passages of scripture which speak of unusual events which have already occurred. To be specific, at the time Jesus used these words, God's people had heard this language used only about national judgments.

For example, in Isa. 19.1-4, Isaiah said of the forthcoming destruction of Egypt:

Behold, Jehovah rideth upon a swift cloud, and cometh unto Egypt . . . And the spirit of Egypt shall fall in the midst of it; and I will destroy the counsel thereof; . . . And I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts.

This language is similar to what Jesus used of His coming on the clouds. It was fulfilled by the captivity of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century B.C.

Similarly, in Jer. 4.13, God used the same type of language to threaten Judah with invasion:

Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind: His horses are swifter than eagles.

In this way, God spoke of His coming on the clouds in the form of the Babylonian army. The Babylonians fulfilled this passage when they captured Judah and took the Jews away into captivity.

Thus, Jesus' language in Mt. 24.29, 30 is used other times in the Bible to speak of a purely physical judgment brought upon a city or nation. When we consider that Jesus said, "*This generation shall not pass away till all these things be accomplished,*" surely Jesus spoke of the destruction which took place about forty years after He uttered this prophecy.

Verse 31: "And he shall send forth 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."

First, we need to realize that the word "angel," which simply means "messenger," may refer to human messengers. It is so used of John the Baptist in Mt. 11.10, the messengers of John the Baptist, in Lk. 7.24, the apostles of Christ, Lk. 9.52, and the Jewish spies in Jas. 2.25.

We understand the significance of "the four winds of heaven" when we consider Lk. 13.29, where Jesus said of His kingdom:

And they shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

The significance of "trumpets" is that they were always instruments of warning or deliverance. Thus, Jesus may well have spoken of the declaration of the gospel by His apostles. The apostles warned this perverse generation of Jews of the judgment to come upon them because of their rejection of the Messiah. This is exactly the thought of verse Mt. 24.14:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come.

Verses 32-34: "Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished."

We have already commented on the "This generation shall not pass away" statement. Here Jesus exhorted the apostles that He had given them signs whereby they could know that the physical judgment He spoke of, the destruction of Jerusalem, was nigh. Then they could flee to the mountains (v16).

Verses 35-36: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."

The language, "heaven and earth shall pass away," causes some to think that Jesus here began to speak of a final return. However, by comparison with other passages where Bible writers used similar language, we can see that Jesus simply spoke of the reliability of the statements He made. For example, in Isa. 54.10, God said:

For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.

In this verse God didn't change the subject from the previous verse and speak about the mountains' departure and the removal of the hills. He simply affirmed how reliable His mercy was. Even if the mountains and hills were dissolved, His people could still depend upon His mercy!

In Mt. 5.18, Jesus used similar language to explain His attitude toward the Law of Moses, when He said:

Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.

Jesus used this language to assure the Jews of the indestructibility of the Old Covenant. Even if heaven and earth do pass away, God's indestructible law would not!

So it is here in Mt. 24.35-36. Heaven and earth may pass away (and they will), but here is some truth that will always stand! The city of Jerusalem is going to be destroyed!

We often hear this passage applied to a final return of Christ. As we take these verses in their proper context, the subject matter here was still the destruction of Jerusalem rather than Christ's final return.

Some say Jesus spoke of two events in this chapter because He said the time of one event (the destruction of Jerusalem) was given (i.e., in this generation), but the time of the second event (a final return of Christ) was not given. Note carefully that Jesus did *not* say the time of one event could be known in advance and the time of the other could not be known in advance. Jesus said the judgment would occur in "this generation," but "of that day and hour knoweth no one." I expect to die *in this generation*, but I know not *the day and the hour*. Does that imply that my death will take place at two different times? I expect my hair to turn completely gray *in this generation*, but I don't know *the day and hour* it will happen. Does that imply it will completely turn gray twice? Neither does Jesus' language imply that He spoke of two events to be fulfilled at two different times.

An Argument Which Shows No Transition Occurs in Matthew 24

At this point we want to show that, from a consideration of Jesus' answer, no transition from one subject to another occurred in Matthew 24. As mentioned earlier, verse 29 is a popular choice for a transition point from the destruction of Jerusalem to the final return. Verse 36 is another popular choice. Consider

carefully that the language of Jesus' answer implied no transition at either verse 29 or verse 36.

In Lk. 17.22-37, Jesus used much the same language as in Matthew 24 in a similar discourse several days before the Matthew 24 discourse. This took place as Jesus and the apostles travelled to Jerusalem for the final week of His life. Notice that several times Jesus interweaves language generally taken to be about a final return in Matthew 24 with language taken to be about the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24. For example, in Lk. 17.26, 27, Jesus said:

And as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, . . .

This language is identical to Mt. 24.37ff, generally taken to be about a final return. It is also *after* the supposed transition in earlier verses.

However, in Lk. 17.31, (the next verse), Jesus said:

In that day, he that shall be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away . . .

This is language identical to Mt. 24.17ff, which is generally applied to the destruction of Jerusalem, and occurs *before* the supposed transition in Matthew 24. In other words, Jesus' reversal of these matters without regard to the supposed transition of Matthew 24 shows no transition took place. Further, no transition occurs between verses 30-31 in Luke 17. When Jesus said, "in that day" in Lk. 17.31, He must have referred to the day when the Son of man was revealed in verse 30.

Also, we find another comparable example in Luke 17. In verses 35-36, Jesus spoke of "two women grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other shall be left." This is the same type of language as in Mt. 24.41, *after* the supposed transition. In the next verse of Luke 17 we find: "And they *answering* say unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Where the body is, thither will the eagles also be gathered together." Again, this is the same language of Mt. 24.28, generally regarded as fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem because it occurs *before* the supposed transition.

In addition, no transition occurs between Lk. 17.36-37 because, in verse 37, the disciples referred to the things Jesus had just said in verse 35: "And they answering say unto him, Where, Lord?" Jesus' language simply will not allow for a transition as supposed in Mt. 24.29 or 36.

If Jesus' language implied a change of subject in Matthew 24, then the same language would have Jesus, in Luke 17, jumping back and forth between these two major Bible subjects as follows:

Did Jesus Make All These Transitions in Luke 17?

vv23-25: Destruction of Jerusalem
vv26-30: Final return
vv31-33: Destruction of Jerusalem
vv34-36: Final return
vs37: Destruction of Jerusalem

Who do we know that teaches or interprets passages in this fashion other than Jehovah's Witnesses? Who can believe that Jesus hopped back and forth from verse to verse to talk about two of the major events of all Bible times? Where else does He do it in all the gospels?

Several years ago, *Reader's Digest* related an incident that occurred when the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) tested the comprehension of the astronauts in a distinctive speed-reading program. NASA composed a special text with every other sentence taken from two entirely different sources about two entirely different subjects. They gave this material to two different groups of astronauts, one which had completed the speed-reading course and one which had not. They were told to read the material as fast as possible and then they would be given a test to determine their level of comprehension.

When the race began, the astronauts who had completed the speed-reading course flashed through the material very rapidly, with no notice that the material dealt with two entirely different subjects line-by-line. The other group read just a few lines, stopped, and exclaimed, "This is nonsense material!" They realized people don't discuss two important subjects simultaneously and switch subjects with every other sentence.

Neither did Jesus in Matthew 24. His language in neither Luke 17 nor Matthew 24 demands that He spoke about a final return. More than that, it means that Jesus did not make such a transition.

Verses 37-44: In these verses, Jesus gave some exhortations to watchfulness. He warned the apostles that, during the physical judgment that came upon Noah's generation, most of the people were not watchful, therefore they perished. So, the ones to whom Jesus spoke were to be watchful so that they could escape and not be consumed in the tragedy which was to befall Jerusalem.

The Judgment Jesus Spoke of in Matthew 24 Is an Escapable Judgment

Jesus spoke of an escapable judgment in Matthew 24, not an inescapable final judgment. Notice Jesus' conclusion in each of the gospel accounts:

Jesus' Conclusion In Mark

Watch therefore: for ye know not when the Lord of the house cometh, whether at midnight or at cockcrowing or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. (13.35-37)

Jesus' Conclusion In Matthew

Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready, for in an hour that yet think not the Son of man cometh. (24.42-44)

Jesus' Conclusion In Luke

But watch ye at every season, making supplication, *that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass*, and to stand before the Son of man. (21.36)

Notice in Mark's and Matthew's accounts, they both gave the same exhortations to watchfulness. Yet, Luke added something in his account which is nowhere present in the other accounts: "But watch ye at every season, making supplication, *that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass*, and to stand before the Son of man."

From these words, Jesus obviously spoke not of a final judgment, from which no man will escape, but the destruction of Jerusalem, from which He desired that the faithful escape. The judgment Jesus spoke about in this chapter was an escapable judgment that was to take place in the lifetime of the generation He spoke to.

Recall now Jesus' words in Mt. 24.15-16:

When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation . . . then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains . . .

Why did He give these signs that were to precede His coming on the clouds? ". . . that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass."

History Records This Happened

As we've seen, the purpose of Jesus' words in this chapter was to warn faithful people who would see the signs of the approaching physical judgment and escape it. Eusebius, a third century historian, wrote of the early Jerusalem church:

The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation given to men of approved piety there before the war removed from the city and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella. (Pamphilus Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Translated by C. F. Cruse, Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1869, lib. 3, chapter 6.)

So, in a siege of Jerusalem where 1,100,000 Jews perished and another two and one half million were taken into slavery, not one faithful individual who heeded the warnings of Jesus given in this chapter perished. Christians fled as Jesus had commanded them to do.

Two Final Points on the Words "End" and "Coming"

We have already noticed the word "end" and "coming" in our analysis of the questions the apostles asked Jesus, which provoked the teaching of Matthew 24. In conclusion, we want to notice two interesting facts about the use of these words. If "end" refers to the end of time or a final return of Christ, and a transition or change of subjects occurs somewhere in the chapter, we would expect Jesus' use of "end" to be in the *latter* part of the chapter. This is *exactly the opposite* of how Jesus used it:

vs6: ". . . for these things must needs come to pass, but the end is not yet."

vs13: "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."

vs14: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, . . . and then shall the end come."

As we have already noticed, these occurrences of "the end" are all *before* verse 34, where Jesus said, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." Hence, the end spoken of is not the end of the world, but the end or consummation of God's plan.

Likewise, when we notice the use of the word "coming" in this chapter (if Jesus used it of a final return), we would find its use in the *latter* part of the chapter; yet, it occurs *throughout* the chapter without regard to any supposed transition in verses 29 or 36. Thus, Jesus spoke of His "coming" both *before and after* any supposed transition.

Summary on Matthew 24

In conclusion, let's briefly summarize the major points of this study. According to the material we've presented here, Jesus did not speak of a final return in Matthew 24 for the following reasons:

I. The apostles did not ask Jesus about a final return.

A. The language of their questions didn't demand it.

B. They wouldn't have asked about a final return because they admittedly didn't expect Jesus to leave then.

II. Jesus' answer didn't demand that He spoke of anything other than a physical judgment against the city of Jerusalem.

III. The judgment of which Jesus spoke was an escapable judgment.

What About Matthew 25?

The question arises, if Matthew 24 does not speak of the final coming of Christ, what about Matthew 25? If the apostles didn't ask Jesus about His final coming and He didn't teach about it, what about the judgment scene described in Mt. 25.31-46?

For years after I reached my present understanding about Matthew 24, I fielded the question this way: Jesus concluded His Matthew 24 discourse with three parables: (1) The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (Mt. 24.45-51), (2) The Ten Virgins (Mt. 25.1-13), and (3) The Talents (Mt. 25.14-30). The main point of each of these parables turned on "watchfulness," whether for the judgment on Jerusalem, or any other judgment, even a final judgment of all men. Thus, Jesus concluded Matthew 24 with these three parables, which illustrated His exhortations to watchfulness. I then reasoned that, if Jesus spoke of His final judgment in Mt. 25.31ff, then it was during those three parables that He made a transition to His teaching about a final judgment. It would be as though while He spoke on watchfulness that He said, "Here is another judgment you need to be watchful for." Then He gave instruction about His final judgment, even though the apostles didn't ask Him about it.

I also made a distinction at Mt. 25.31, where Jesus spoke of His coming in glory, and contrasted that with His coming in judgment in Matthew 24. I now realize that the judgment in Matthew 24 was also a coming in glory. First, notice in Mt. 16.27-28, Jesus spoke of a coming in glory in His generation:

For the Son of man shall come in the *glory* of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. Verily I say unto you, *There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*

Thus, Jesus spoke of a coming in glory, where every man will be judged according to his deeds, and these events would take place because of the Christ's rule. His rule was to commence during the lifetime of those who heard Him.

Likewise, notice also in Lk. 9.26-27, where Jesus foretold a coming in glory in that generation:

For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in his own glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels. But I tell you of a truth, There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.

These passages teach the same thing as Matthew 24. The destruction of Jerusalem was also a coming in glory. Hear Him in Mt. 24.30:

. . . and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

As Jesus taught in Mt. 24.34, His coming in glory was to occur in that generation. Thus, the coming in glory in Mt. 25.32 is not a new subject. Jesus had long prophesied a like coming during the lifetime of His listeners. With these comments in mind, let's look at Mt. 25.31-46:

Verses 31-32: "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him; then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats."

As we have already noticed, Mt. 16.27-28 spoke of a like judgment in that generation. This judgment would "render unto every man according to his deeds." Surely, He didn't speak of men in America (in that generation), but men in that generation of Jews.

"But," someone says, "Mt. 25.32 says "nations." How can a judgment which involves nations speak of just a national judgment on Israel?" This is a notable objection until we realize that the land of Israel comprised many nations. We normally think of Israel of Jesus' time as one nation, but not so. For example, the Jewish historian Josephus referred to the nation of the Samaritans, the nation of the Galileans, and the nations of Idumea, Perea, Trachonitis, Iturea, and Abilene. Judea was spoken of as a distinct nation, with a king of its own. The Greek term *ethnarch* (literally, "ruler of a nation") described the rulers of these nations.

This agrees with Jesus' own usage in Mt. 24.7, where He said: For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . .

Jesus spoke of many nations in that region, with Jews in all, which would be affected by the Roman invasion of the land. In Lk. 21.25-32, Luke quoted Jesus:

And there shall be signs in sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows . . . This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished.

Accordingly, "all the nations" could well speak of the nations of Palestine. As we've seen, these are the very nations in Matthew 24.

Verse 33: "and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left."

Again, this agrees with Mt. 16.27-28, which says He would "render to every man according to his deeds . . . some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death . . ."

Verses 34-40: "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me."

Notice what the destiny of the righteous and wicked hangs on in this judgment. On faith in Christ? No. On whether they've been baptized? No. On benevolence toward Christians? Not at all. On whether they observed the Lord's supper? He did not mention it. On whether they were faithful in church discipline? No. Assembling? No, nor on personal evangelism, nor any of the other things Christians concern themselves about at a final judgment.

However, it sounds exactly like a judgment on the Jews of Jesus' time, many of whom weren't merciful or benevolent. For example, in Mt. 9.13 Jesus condemned many of the Jews for their emphasis on religious ritual rather than their treatment of their fellow man:

But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.

Likewise, in Mt. 23.23, 24, Jesus finally condemned them in a similar manner:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel!

Likewise, in Luke 10, Jesus showed in the parable of the good Samaritan that the Samaritans knew more about how to treat their fellow man than did many of the Jews. Thus, for their lack of mercy, Jesus affirmed that they would not receive mercy, not at the final judgment, but in His destruction of Jerusalem.

Verse 41: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels."

"Eternal fire" without doubt makes us think of the final judgment, but should it necessarily do so? Can this language apply to a national judgment? Many would insist not, but look carefully at Jude 7. In a context where Jude showed that God knows how to punish false teachers, he used the example of what God did to the unbelieving Jews He brought out of Egypt, sinful angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah. About these two cities, Jude wrote:

Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, having in like manner with these given themselves over to fornication and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire.

This language is identical to that used by Jesus, "eternal fire," yet Jude used it of a national judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah. It is not a judgment that Sodom and Gomorrah will suffer in the future, but one they have already suffered. If they haven't yet suffered this judgment, they cannot be set forth as an example that God knows how to render judgment on the wicked.

Jesus possibly used *eternal fire* the same way in Matthew 25. If so, this could be the same baptism of fire John the Baptist promised disobedient Jews in Mt. 3.10-12:

And even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.

While many view "baptism in fire" as a blessing, Jesus' use of fire three times in this passage shows He didn't intend it so. "Fire" in Mt. 3.10 represented destruction and punishment, as it was in Mt. 3.12. It takes great violence to the

context to make "fire" in verse 11 to be anything except destruction and punishment. The punishment John spoke about was as imminent as the axe at the root of the tree. He spoke of the imminent national judgment upon the nations of the region by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Verses 45-46: "Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life."

Thus, Jesus concluded with language similar to verse 41: national condemnation upon disobedient Jews for their shallow adherence to the Law of Moses.

Conclusion

Jesus provided a way for faithful Jews (who became Christians) to know when Rome was about to destroy Jerusalem and the practice of the Mosaic Law. This should be a real faith-builder for Christians today. It was a logical extension because God had always provided a way of escape for His people in trying circumstances. In Ezekiel 9, God marked His people so they wouldn't be destroyed in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. In Ac. 18.9-10, Jesus told Paul in Corinth not to be afraid, for "no man shall set on thee to harm thee." In Jn. 18.8, at His own arrest, Jesus expressed concern for the safety of His apostles. Likewise, in Matthew 24, Jesus provided protection for the faithful. As Paul said in I Cor. 10.13:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.

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**II Peter 3:
*Destruction of the Universe or
Destruction of Jerusalem?***

Samuel G. Dawson

This booklet offers a brief study of II Peter 3. Although for many years the author, along with most Bible students now, believed this chapter dealt with the final advent of Christ, he now believes it deals with the destruction of Jerusalem. This, however, does not make his position right, but he hopes you will at least examine this position to see if it doesn't deal with the text more accurately than his previously held, and the more popular, position.

Introduction to II Peter

II Peter is, of course, the second of two books written by the apostle Peter shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. Scholars generally date the books about 66-67 A.D. The theme of I Peter is hope, i.e., it was written to instill hope in Christians who underwent severe persecution in those years. The theme of II Peter is knowledge, the knowledge to combat certain false teachers of the time. Chapter One deals with the importance of knowledge, Chapter Two with the character of the false teachers, and Chapter Three with the character of their false teaching. The false teachers were denying the coming of Christ, and it is about this coming we now concern ourselves. Was Jesus coming in the person of the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem in 70 A.D., or was he coming at the end of time?

II Peter 3 is a more detailed account of the judgment Peter had already touched upon in I Pet. 4.7-19. In the context of I Peter, Peter said that "the end of all things is at hand," (verse 7). He spoke of "the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you," (verse 12). He spoke of the "revelation of his [Jesus'] glory," (verse 13). This corresponds to Mt. 24.30, where Jesus had described the destruction of Jerusalem as a coming in glory, which would occur in that generation (Mt. 24.34). Peter also said, "for the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God," (verse 17). In verse 18 he asked, "And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" In verse 19 he said, "Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator." Thus, I Peter deals with an imminently upcoming judgment that would seriously affect the children of God. II Peter occurs in this same context of imminent judgment. Does it deal with the same judgment as I Peter, the destruction of Jerusalem, or does it deal with a totally new subject, an advent of Christ at the end of time? Does it describe the end of Judaism, as discussed in Matthew 24, or does it describe the end of the planet and astronomical heavens, as we so often hear it portrayed? To investigate the answers to these questions is the purpose of this booklet.

Brief Commentary on II Peter 3

We now give a brief verse-by-verse commentary on this chapter.

Verse 1: This is now, beloved, the second epistle that I write unto you; and in both of them I stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance;

This verse shows how we know this is the second letter. Peter stated the purpose: to stir up their minds, to keep their thinking on the right track. Then Peter proceeded to admonish Christians to study:

Verse 2: that ye should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles:

Here Peter commanded Christians to be serious students of the holy prophets—the Old Testament, as well as the teaching of the apostles—the New Testament. If someone now denied that Christians should study the teaching of the apostles, the commandment of the Lord and Saviour, we would surely take issue. Do we argue as vigorously if someone says Christians today don't need to study seriously the holy prophets who spoke before? Usually not, hence our problems with interpreting much of the New Testament—we don't know nearly enough about the Old Testament! In verse 8, Peter quoted Ps. 90.4; in verse 13, he quoted from Isaiah concerning the new heavens and new earth. Without familiarity with these Old Testament prophets, we're not the calibre of Christians to whom this letter was written originally. That makes us apt to fall for just any interpretation offered to us.

Peter made three great statements about a Christian's relation to the Old Testament. In I Pet. 1.12, he implied the Old Testament was written more for us than for the Old Testament people themselves. In II Pet. 1.19 he commanded Christians to study it, and here in II Pet. 3.2, he again commanded Christians to study the Old Testament. This lack of in-depth understanding of the holy prophets is probably one important way we don't imitate New Testament Christians. Thus, our ignorance makes it easy for us to jump to false conclusions that the Christians of Peter's day wouldn't have embraced.

We now ask the logical question: *Where did the Old Testament prophets speak of a final advent of Christ at the end of time?* Of course, premillennialists think many such passages exist, but we deny it. All the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Christ's birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, rule over his kingdom, and the severance of the wicked Jews from that kingdom. We know of no specific Old Testament prophecy that reaches beyond the fall of the Roman empire. The scope of this booklet is not to refute premillennialism and its misuse of Old Testament prophecy, as we have already done in *Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, and Exposed*. Rather, our purpose is to examine whether II Peter 3 reaches beyond the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Old Testament prophets taught many times about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Malachi did in chapters 3 and 4. John the Baptist did in Mt. 3.10-11. Isaiah did as well. Thus, the coming of the Lord of which Peter spoke may easily be seen to be the Lord's coming spoken of by Jesus in his generation (Mt. 24.34), i.e., the destruction of Jerusalem discussed by the Old Testament prophets.

Peter then warned of false teachers coming in the last days:

Verse 3: knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts,

What does "last days" mean? Many times, we hear it applied to the entire period of time beginning at the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ until now. In Ac. 2.17, Peter said that what happened on Pentecost was what Joel wrote about when he wrote about the last days. Have we now had about two thousand years of last days, i.e., the time of the Messiah's rule, or were these the last days of Judaism? Unless II Pet. 3.3 is the exception, the last days spoken of in the New Testament are the last days of Judaism, i.e., the time from the coming of John the Baptist to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. For example, see I Pet. 1.20 where God's son was manifested in the flesh in the last days. He wasn't manifested after his rule began, but in the last days of Judaism. In Heb. 1.2, Jesus fully and finally spoke in the last days. Again, this is not after Pentecost, but in the last days of Judaism. In Isa. 2.2 and Dan. 2.28-45, prophets said the kingdom of the Messiah would begin in the last days and during the Roman Empire. This is easily seen to be the last days of Judaism, not the two thousand years since Pentecost. In Heb. 9.16, 26, Christ's blood was to ratify the new covenant in the last days. This is the last days of Judaism, not the time following Pentecost. In Joel 2.28 and Ac. 2.17, the Spirit was to be poured out in the last days, i.e., during the last days of Judaism, not throughout the Messiah's rule since Pentecost. Peter warned of the false teachers of his day, whose character he had just described in II Peter 2. In Dan. 9.24-27, 12.4, 13, Mt. 24.3, 13f, and Ac. 2.19-21, we see that the last days were when Jerusalem was to fall totally. Thus, most probably the last days are the last days of Judaism, not the age of the Messiah's reign since Pentecost.

Peter said that in the last days of Judaism, the time when he was writing this very letter, that mockers would come. A mocker plays like children, or trifles with something, as opposed to engaging in serious argument or debate. Peter continued with an example of the mockery:

Verse 4: and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

These men were Jewish scoffers, their fathers were the Jewish fathers. Christ had promised an imminent return in Mt. 10.23, 16.28, 26.64, and Lk. 21.27-33 in which he would destroy Jerusalem. He said this coming would come to pass in that generation, Mt. 24.34. Stephen confirmed this coming, Ac. 6.4 ("we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place"), and so did the author of Hebrews in 10.37 ("For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry"). Even James in Jas. 5.7-11 taught it ("coming," verse 7, "at hand," verse 8, "the judge standeth before the doors," verse 9, so "be patient and wait for the lord's coming," verse 7). These Jewish scoffers now said, "It's been thirty-five years since Jesus made the promise. Jesus preached it; the apostles did; we've been preaching this; we've been waiting; and things keep going right on. Since he hasn't come in thirty-five years, *he won't come!*" These men were not looking for something far off, the way we many times use the passage, but for something in their generation. Peter next showed the fallacy of their position:

Verse 5: For this they willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God;

This verse illustrates the free will of man. These men exercised free will by working and striving to forget. They were willing to forget the heavens and earth from of old which were to pass away. Notice: this is the heavens and earth that existed before the flood of Noah's day.

Verse 6: by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

The old world perished by the same means by which God created it—by God. Notice that the world that then perished, the old heavens and earth was not the globe and sky. They were still there as Peter wrote, but he spoke of the old world order. Likewise, the planet and stars Peter lived on and under were the same planet and stars Noah lived on and under. Accordingly, the earth and heavens that passed away were not the planet and stars, but the corrupt pre-flood order. The planet and stars Peter lived on and under are the same planet and stars we live on and under. Consequently, the earth and heavens that are about to pass away in II Peter 3 are not the planet and stars, but the religious order Peter was living under, i.e., Judaism.

Old Heavens and Earth vs. New Heavens and Earth

Old Testament writers used the passing of an old heavens and earth and the coming in of a new heavens and earth to speak of the passing away of one social order and the bringing in of another. For example, in Isa. 34.1-4, Isaiah said it of Edom. For Edom, the old heavens and earth passed away, and a new set came in when Edom was destroyed. In Isa. 51.4-7, Isaiah said the same of Israel. God took away the order with which they were familiar, and brought in a new one, restored, purified Israel. In Isa. 65.16-17, physical Israel would pass away, and a new order beyond the first coming of Christ, the Messiah's rule over Christians, would come. Haggai 2.6f contains the same language, which Heb. 12.27 quotes as fulfilled in the late 60s when Hebrews was written—the same time II Peter was written! II Peter 3.1-14 depicts the same change of order. Revelation 21 depicts the passing of the old order of Christians persecuted to the new order of Christians enthroned in the new order described in Revelation 21-22, the heavenly reward of the martyrs.

The judgment in Noah's day was typical of the judgment on Jerusalem in the first century. Both were escapable judgments. Jesus even paralleled the two judgments, Mt. 24.37ff. Both judgments took the wicked away, and not the righteous. Both were world-wide events, for Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem when it fell. This was because the city was besieged at the time of the Passover (Josephus, *Wars*, 6, 9, 3.)

Peter continued by saying:

Verse 7: but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

When Peter spoke of the heavens and earth that "are" to him in 66-67 A.D., he lived on the same globe and under the same sky as Noah, and that we do. He spoke of the old order of Judaism. The three "heaven and earth" systems of which Peter spoke are illustrated in the chart on the next page.

Malachi foretold that Jerusalem was stored up for fire (chapters 3-4), as did John the Baptist (Mt. 3.10-11), and Jesus (Mt. 16.27-28, Mt. 24). God would not use a flood to destroy the order of Peter's day. It would be burned out.

That the old order of Judaism was stored up for fire meant its national overthrow. In Isa. 33.14, speaking of the destruction of Assyria by Babylon, God used terms like "consuming fire, everlasting burning." In Jer. 4.4, God spoke of the destruction of Israel when he said she would "burn with none to quench it," i.e., unquenchable fire. Amos 5.6 describes the destruction of Israel by Assyria in the same terms. See also Isa. 66.24, where Isaiah described the church victorious over its enemies in the same terms.

Thus, fire was to be the Jews' fate, as Peter described it. It was so preached in the first gospel sermon in Ac. 2.17ff, when Peter quoted from Joel: "blood, fire, and columns of smoke." John the Baptist spoke of it (Mt. 3.10-11). Jesus himself said, "I came to bring fire on the earth (land)," Lk. 12.49. James 5.3 and I Thes. 2.16 say the same thing. Last, the fiery fate of Sodom was also a type of Jerusalem's fate, Lk. 17.29f. History confirms that Jerusalem was burned to the ground.

This was the day of judgment for Judaism. Peter had so spoken of it in his first epistle, I Pet. 4.12-17. In Mt. 16.27-28, Jesus said this judgment would take place while some of his apostles were still alive. Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem as a day of judgment, Mt. 25.32. (Read a detailed discussion of Matthew 25 in the author's *Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, Exposed*, chapter entitled "Matthew 24.")

Verse 8: But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

When Peter said that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, he didn't say you can substitute one thousand years for one day wherever you want to. One might say one day equals one thousand years. Consequently, two days equal two thousand years. So 365 days equal 365,000 years. Therefore, one year equals 365,000 years, and one year equals 365,000 years, which also equals one day! You can't have it both ways, literally. Peter spoke as the Psalmist in Ps. 90.4, when he said:

For a thousand years in thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night.

A watch in the night was generally three hours. The psalmist said one thousand years to God is like three hours, i.e., time doesn't mean that much to God. If I borrow twenty dollars from you, and I haven't paid you back in 35 years, you would write the debt off.

Peter said these false teachers had better not do that with God. Peter told why in the next verse:

Verse 9: The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Peter explained that the reason Christ hadn't come and destroyed Jerusalem was not because God was slack, i.e., he was not loitering around, or "goofing off." He hadn't forgotten his promise. The reason Christ hadn't come was because of his longsuffering.

Paul, in Rom. 2.4, said that the longsuffering of God works repentance. If God destroyed us immediately when we sinned, none of us would be alive. If He waited five minutes after we sinned to destroy us, we still wouldn't be alive. We want longer, unless of course, someone sins against us, then perhaps we don't want so long! Why does God wait at all? He wants people to change their minds, not because He forgot.

Peter said that God didn't want any to perish. This is the same perishing of which Jesus spoke in Lk. 13.3, "Except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish." There, he warned the Jews of his day: "He will avenge them speedily." Then Peter gave three reasons for God's delay. Verse 8 speaks of God's timeless existence, verse 9 refers to his longsuffering, and verse 10 states that the Jews' cup of iniquity had to be full, just like the Canaanites in Gen. 15.16 before they were destroyed, and Jonah 3.2ff, when God gave a forty-day delay that Nineveh might repent.

Verse 10: But the day of the Lord will come as a thief: in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Peter said the day of the Lord *would* come. The false teachers were wrong, it would come. The Old Testament, with the exception of the sabbath day, uses the term "day of the Lord" nearly exclusively of national judgment. In Isa. 13.6-9, Babylon received "destruction from the Almighty" on such a day. In Ezk. 30.3, 10 Egypt did. In Joel 1.15, Israel was to see just such a day, just twenty years off. In Joel 2.1, Israel was to see a day of the Lord, the very one of which John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter spoke. In Obadiah 1.5, Edom was to see such a day. In Zeph. 1.14f, Judah would see "the great day of the Lord," when Babylon destroyed her in 586 B.C. So was the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem a "day of the Lord," as Peter said in Ac. 2.17ff (cf. Joel 2.31f, 3.14-17), and our Lord himself in Mt. 24.27, 30.

Saying that the day of the Lord would "come as a thief," Peter recognized thieves don't send cards saying, "I plan to be in your neighborhood at 10:00 p.m. Tuesday night. Please have everything ready." Though we don't know when the next thief is coming, that doesn't mean we can't have everything ready! The thief's coming will not be by invitation or announcement. Peter said the Lord's coming would not be by invitation or

announcement, either. Jesus gave the same warning about the destruction of Jerusalem in Mt. 24.43 and Lk. 21.34-36.

When Peter said the heavens would pass away, he used language common in the Old Testament to speak of the overthrow of political powers. In Isa. 14.12f, the fall of the ruler of Babylon was spoken of as a falling star. In Isa. 13.10, 13, 19, Isaiah used such language to describe the fall of Babylon; in Isa. 34.4, the fall of Edom. In Isa. 51.6, the nation of Israel would so fall. In Joel 3.16, the fall of Jerusalem after the Messiah was foretold in such words. Peter said it would be so with the destruction of Jerusalem. Peter had said the same thing in Ac. 2.19ff, when he quoted Joel. 2.28-32 in the first gospel sermon. Haggai used the same language in Hag. 2.6, *quoted in Heb. 12.26-28 to speak of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem*. Jesus used the same language in Mt. 24.39-42 and Lk. 21.26, 11.

When Peter said "the elements shall melt with fervent heat," we quickly think of elements which consist of atoms, and that Peter spoke of the conflagration of our whole universe. The word *elements* is given for the Greek word *stoicheion*, which occurs seven times in the New Testament. In Heb. 5.12 it stands for the rudiments of Judaism, as seen in Heb. 6.4-6. In Gal. 4.3, it depicts the rudiments of the world, for those under the law of Moses, the rudiments of Judaism. In Gal. 4.9, it represents the weak and beggarly rudiments, identified as the days, months, seasons, and years of Judaism. In Col. 2.20, it denotes the rudiments of the world, probably Gnostic borrowing from Judaism. In none of these passages does anyone think of atomic elements. Then Peter used it in II Pet. 3.10, 12, where the idea comes nearly automatically to mind. No, it's the rudimentary principles of Judaism again, the priesthood, the temple, it's sacrifices, the city of Jerusalem, and the genealogies. All were swept away in the destruction which was imminently to occur.

Peter said they would be dissolved. Dissolved here comes from *luo*, used in Eph. 2.14, "*broken down* the middle wall" between Jews and Gentiles, again speaking of the destruction of Judaism's constraints between Jews and Gentiles. It's also the word used in I Jn. 3.8, where John said that Christ was "*manifested to destroy* the works of the devil."

When Peter said the earth (that then was) and the works (that were therein) were to be burned up, he spoke of the same refining of Israel that John the Baptist had announced in Mt. 3.10-12, the burning up of the chaff. Malachi foretold this refining process in Mal. 3.2-5, 4.1-6. "Earth" here may also be "land." See, for example, Lk. 21.26, 23 where the same term means the land of Israel.

Next Peter turned his attention to the lessons that could be learned from the heavens and earth passing away:

Verse 11: Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness,

Peter here spoke of the dissolving (literally, tearing up, breaking down) of these things, i.e., the earth and the works that then were. Whether he spoke of the destruction of

Jerusalem or a final advent of Christ, the message was the same: *Get prepared!* He asked, "What manner of persons ought you to be?" He used a word which literally means "of what country should you be?" We might ask this same question in this way, "If the United States is about to wipe out Cuba, of what country should you be?" Not Cuba! Likewise, the Jews to whom Peter wrote had better not be of physical Israel, of Judaism, for God would destroy it.

Likewise, the author of Hebrews mentioned the faithful father of the Jews, who were "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Paul also reminded Christians in Phil. 3.20 that "our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." This is the manner of person Peter said they ought to be in all holy living and godliness. In other words, both their actions and their attitudes should be prepared. Peter continued his admonition:

Verse 12: looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

This "looking for and earnestly desiring the day of God" is the same as Jesus' exhortations to watchfulness in Mt. 24.44ff. The day of God has to be the destruction of Jerusalem rather than a final advent for two reasons: First, they couldn't look for a final advent of Christ, for there are no signs given of a final advent at the end of time. Second, the final advent wasn't near in Peter's day! However, Peter's audience could look for the destruction of Jerusalem, for Jesus had given signs, Mt. 24.3-15, 32-45 and Lk. 12.56, 21.28. In Heb. 10.25, the author of Hebrews also said his Jewish readers could see the day drawing nigh!

Peter then mentioned that the heavens being on fire would be dissolved. These were the old heavens of Peter's day, the old heavens and earth, the old order. Peter said it would be on fire, and be dissolved. These were expressions similar to those already used to describe the change from the old order to the new, like Edom and physical Israel in the Old Testament.

Peter then described the new order which would replace the old which was about to pass away:

Verse 13: But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

This new heavens and new earth were not a new planet and skies, any more than the new heavens and earth after Noah were a new planet and skies. Peter spoke of the new order of things after the destruction of Jerusalem, the victorious church having weathered Jewish persecution, victorious Christians withstanding potential eradication by Jews. In Isa. 65.17 we have the new heavens and new earth identified as Jerusalem. Hebrews 12.22 tells us this was new Jerusalem, the New Testament church victorious. Isaiah 66.22 also spoke of new Jerusalem, telling of the days of the work of the apostles, Ac. 3.18-24.

Peter told Christians of his day to look for this new order, not implying that Christ did not yet rule, but that his rule had not been completely vindicated by the destruction of the old order. Thus, in Dan. 7.18, 22, under persecution in the Roman empire, Christians were in the kingdom before the enemy was destroyed, but when the enemy was finally destroyed, then they possessed the kingdom. It was not only prophesied that the kingdom was unshakable, but also that it would be proven.

Peter then made the application to the lives of his readers:

Verse 14: Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight.

Again, these instructions could not refer to a final advent of Christ, for there was nothing pertaining to that event that first-century Christians could "look for." However, in Matthew 24-25, with its parallel passages, as well as in I Peter, many instructions to watchfulness had been given concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

Peter continued the application to the lives of his readers:

Verse 15: And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you;

The imminent judgment Peter spoke of was indeed written of by Paul. For example, in Rom. 2.6 Paul warned of a "day of wrath" coming on the Jews of his day. In Rom. 13.11-12, he said, "The day is at hand," when speaking of their imminent judgment. In I Corinthians, Paul warned of a coming judgment on Jews in 1.7, 3.15, 4.5, 5.5, 7.29-31, and 10.11. In Phil. 4.5, Paul warned, "The Lord is at hand." Modernists oftentimes think Paul (and even Jesus) were mistaken about how imminent Jesus' coming in judgment was. No, the modernists are mistaken. John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, and Peter all warned of a coming conflagration which would wipe out the Jewish religion for its apostasy. Peter affirmed that he wasn't teaching anything that Paul hadn't taught already.

Peter then commented on the quality of Paul's teaching:

Verse 16: as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

We can take heart from this comment. If the apostle Peter thought Paul's writing contained some difficulties, we ought not to be surprised if some of them seem difficult to us.

Peter concluded with exhortations to faithfulness in view of the coming imminent judgment on the Jewish nation:

Verse 17: Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness.

Verse 18: But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Conclusion

As we've seen, the purpose of Peter's words in this chapter was to warn faithful people of his time concerning the approaching physical judgment so they could escape it. Eusebius, a third-century historian, wrote of the early Jerusalem church:

The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation given to men of approved piety therefore before the war removed from the city and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella. (Pamphilus Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, translated by C. F. Cruse [Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1869], lib. 3, chapter 6.)

So, in a siege of Jerusalem where 1.1 million Jews perished and another 2.5 million were taken into slavery, not one faithful individual who heeded the warnings of John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul and Peter perished.

Thus, both the harmony of Old Testament passages with the New Testament and history, indicate that II Peter 3 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. To use these passages to teach about the destruction of the universe at the end of time is to rip them out of their context, not only in Jesus' and Paul's teaching, but also the whole Bible.

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