

AUGUST

THE REFLECTOR

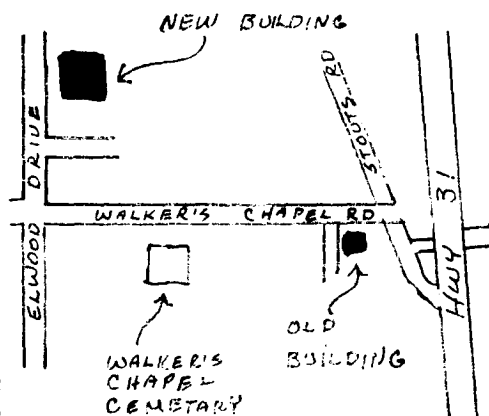
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OCT. 1

3:00 P.M.

We begin
meeting at
our new
location
on
Elkwood
Drive
Oct. 1, 1978



GOSPEL MEETING

SPEAKER: Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

OCT. 1-6

7:30 P.M.

Sunday Morning: 9:45 & 10:45

Signs of His Coming – Matthew 24

• by David E. Curtis

Every premillennialist and Jehovah's Witness abuses this chapter! You'll want to read this one...

Many believe the Bible teaches the imminent return of Christ, and some are on the verge of openly predicting that return in 1975. We are told that Matthew 24 plainly teaches this. Everywhere one looks, he sees evidence that many are looking for Christ's return based upon certain signs set forth in Matthew 24. In a recent pamphlet handed out by the Jehovah's Witnesses, they confidently affirm that time is running out and that Matthew 24 points to conclusive signs that "this system of things" is about to end.

A proper understanding of Matthew 24 will eliminate such unfounded assertions and speculations.

Background to Chapter 24

Matthew 24 is the culmination of a series of pronouncements against the Jewish nation that began in chapter 3 by John the Baptist when he said, "Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 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" (vs. 7-10). John warned that "even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees" – which was simply a warning of the impending destruction of the Jewish economy.

Jesus Himself ended these pronouncements and declared the end of the Jewish state in Matthew 23 and 24. One cannot understand chapter 24 apart from its context in chapter 23 which is a scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees, and He calls them "offspring of vipers" just as John had. Jesus said they could not escape the judgment of hell (v. 33), and declared that "all these things shall come upon *this generation*" (v. 36). Keep

the expression "this generation" in mind, for it is very important in understanding chapter 24. The discourse of chapter 23 ends with Jesus declaring, "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" (vs. 38-39). The Olivet discourse which follows in chapter 24 will reveal the one who comes "in the name of the Lord." It is the Roman army against Jerusalem and the Jewish state.

The immediate context of the Olivet discourse shows that the principal

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point of discussion was the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The teaching of Jesus in chapter 23 took place in the temple. As Jesus leaves the temple, His disciples came to show Him the buildings of it, and He said to them, "See ye not all these things? Verily, I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (24:2).

Matthew 24 – Two Questions

Such a great calamity could hardly be imagined by the Jewish mind. Naturally they wanted to know more about the destruction of the temple,

so they came to Jesus as He sat on the mount of Olives and said, "Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (v. 3). There are two questions here: (1) When shall these things (destruction of the temple) be; and (2) What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? In the mind of the Jewish disciple, both of these events would most certainly take place at the same time, but Jesus' answer makes a clear cleavage between the two.

In reference to the first question, Jesus showed there would be many signs. First, He warned that there were some *misleading signs*, "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. 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" (vs. 4-6). These misleading signs: false teachers (v. 5), wars (v. 6), famines and pestilence (v. 7), earthquakes (v. 7), were the beginning of travail for the Jewish people (v. 8), and in view of the "time text" (v. 34) which will be discussed shortly, need no further explanation.

The *real* sign of the destruction of the temple was "the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (v. 15). To understand what this means, we have but to turn to Luke's account of the Olivet discourse. Luke 21:20 says, "But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand." Thus, the first part of Matthew 24 deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by armies, and the attendant signs have to do with that event and not the second coming of Christ.

The Roman Army was "the abomination of desolation" because they carried ensigns consisting of eagles and

images of the emperor to which divine honors were paid. The word "abomination" in the book of Daniel applied to idolatry, and it cannot be denied that the idolatrous ensigns of the Romans fit very well into the Biblical significance of the term. Josephus, the great Jewish historian, gives this description of the city of Jerusalem after it was taken: "And now the Romans, upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings round about it, brought their ensigns to the Temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them" (*Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, Chap. 6).

The Time Text

Verse 34 can be properly called the time text, because it identifies the time to which these signs belong. Jesus said, "Verily, I say unto you, *This generation* shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." The key to understanding the signs and their attendant consequence is the expression "this generation." It is the same generation of "offspring of vipers" to whom Jesus was speaking in chapter 23 and to whom John was speaking in chapter 3.

Some have grossly perverted "this generation" to make it mean "race," "nation," or "Israel." Dr. L. S. Chafer, in his book, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy*, states: "Israel, as a nation, not one generation, is to be divinely preserved until all be fulfilled: 'Verily I say unto you, This generation (genea, race, or stock, Israel) shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled'" (p. 137). (Quoted by J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew XXIV, An Exposition*, p. 3.)

The Jehovah's Witnesses also make the same mistake. They make "this generation" begin in 1914! It is seen in their little book *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life* on page 95.

"Generation" nowhere in Scripture suggests the idea of a nation in its successive generations. It means a contemporary race, people living at the same time, the generation then living. All one need do is see how Matthew himself uses the term in 1:17; 11:16f; 12:38-48; and 23:36. By no stretch of the imagination could one make Jesus' statement refer to a generation beginning in 1914 and continuing until now! That is not "truth that leads to eternal life," but a lie that will lead to eternal damnation (see 2 Thess. 2:11-12).

"This generation" referred to that group of people living at the same time Jesus was talking.

I can well remember my own attempt to teach Matthew 24 without proper study. I was making a wrong analysis and drawing wrong conclusions, because I did not take proper note of verse 34, the time text. Fortunately, a fine elder in the church corrected me, and I have been grateful to him for it. If verse 34 is understood, wild claims and speculations about the second coming of Christ would cease. At least those would which claim to have a scriptural basis in Matthew 24:1-34.

The first part of Matthew 24 deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by armies, and the attendant signs have to do with that event and not the second coming of Christ.

The Second Coming of Christ

In verses 35-51 of Matthew 24, Jesus discusses the second question: What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world. The transition from one question to the other is seen in verse 35, when He said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall never pass away." That another subject is under consideration beginning with verse 36 is seen in the expression "of that day and hour" in contrast to the previous discussion of "those days" (vs. 19,22,29). "That day and hour" refers to the second

coming of Christ and the final judgment (note Matt. 7:22; John 6:44). That the two events take place at the same time is seen from 1 Corinthians 4:5, "Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise from God." And, "*OF THAT DAY AND HOUR KNOWETH NO ONE, NOT EVEN THE ANGELS OF HEAVEN, NEITHER THE SON, BUT THE FATHER ONLY.*" Let all such speculation cease!

In reference to signs of His coming, Jesus plainly teaches there will be NONE. He said it would be "as in the days of Noah" when normal events were transpiring and "they knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of Man" (vs. 37-39). He also likened His coming to the coming of a thief in the night (vs. 42f), and taught that one did not know the day nor the hour (v. 50).

One must always be in a state of watchfulness in regard to the Lord's second coming. Jesus said, "Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh" (v. 42). One must be ready: "Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of Man cometh" (v. 44).

Many have been drawn off into speculative systems, been disappointed when speculation did not become a fact, and lost their faith. False systems have sprung up based upon erroneous beliefs about the Second Advent of Christ. While believing strongly in the second coming, and trying to be prepared, we must oppose all systems not based upon a proper teaching of the Scriptures.

Conclusion

We have not intended this article to be a detailed exegesis of Matthew 24, but rather a brief analysis of its general teaching, in order to keep one from false assertions and speculations regarding the second coming of Christ. Much thought and study must be given to understanding all that is said in Matthew 24, but what is here given will certainly keep one from going off the deep end or adopting outright unscriptural positions.

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God Is There

• by Dave Bradford

Reasonable men should consider the abundant evidence pointing to God's existence...

In the hustle and bustle of our urban and suburban life, it seems that many men fail to pause long enough to look below the surface and see the evidence that should convince them that God does exist. Lack of faith is not because of insufficient evidence, but so often man's eyes, ears, and thoughts are so centered upon what he is doing with God's creation, that this tends to cover up the wonder of the things that originated with God.

However, every day we live, we are confronted with evidence that God is there. Whether we look to the starry sky, the rolling plains, the lofty mountains, the ocean depths, a beautiful flower, or the wondrous human anatomy with its senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, its ability to heal itself, its power of reproduction, and finally, its power to reason — this reasoning ability is compelled to search out the answer to the question of the origin of all these things.

The very existence of the universe and the orderliness, precision, and beauty seen in it argues for an adequate intelligent power as its source and that source could only be the all-wise, all-powerful God.

You may have never seen the architect or builders of the house in which you live, but you nonetheless believe in their existence as much as if you knew them personally and had seen the plans being drawn and the construction in progress. The existence of the house with its arrangement and beauty convincingly argues for the intelligence, skill, and power of the architect and construction crew.

The watch on your arm or the clock on your wall works with such precision that its existence argues for the intelligence, skill, and power of its maker. However, we should stop and think, and ask, "With what does it keep time?" Of course, the answer is, "The giant clocklike universe in which we live." A universe of such boundless magnitude, orderliness, precision, and

beauty, soundly argues for an intelligence and power far superior to that of humans. Instead of the wonder of man's creations hiding the evidence for the existence of God, it really points up to the superior intelligence, skill, and power that is necessary to adequately explain the origin of that universe which was placed in the hands of man to subdue and have dominion over (Psalms 8).

If someone suggested that in an explosion, bits of metal, plastic, jewel, and paint combined together to form a watch that keeps accurate time, such absurdity would render it impossible for us to listen with seriousness. How preposterous for someone to say that man and the universe are the result of chance.

Few passages in the Bible argue for the existence of God, and those few do not develop a lengthy, formal argument. However, the obvious needs little defense. But God in His written word explains, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Yes, "a living God . . . made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: who in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways. And yet he left not himself without witness, in that he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:15-17). And finally, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Psalms 19:1-2).

God's own creation convincingly argues, "God is there."

A thinking man humbly responds with, "I believe."

Yet, how many really live like God is there? Do you?

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