

**CHRIST WARNS FOR YOUR GOOD**  
**(SUNDAY, MAY 1, 2011)**

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**Scripture Reading:** Daniel 11:29-35; Matthew 24:15-28

The book of Hebrews similar to the gospel of Matthew was initially written for a primarily Jewish audience. Jesus warned His disciples of coming persecution. The book of Hebrews written about 30 years later also addresses the subject of persecution and suffering for the name of Christ.

The book of Hebrews is filled with warnings. In chapter 12, encouragement and warning are given about being discouraged by difficulty. The original readers of the book of Hebrews were experiencing a time of suffering and yet it was not to the point of bloodshed as we read in Hebrews 12:4. The author of Hebrews tells his readers that they have forgotten the exhortation from the book of Proverbs 3:11-12.

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”

The author of Hebrews further draws the comparison between the discipline that an earthly father gives and that which our Heavenly Father gives.

**9** Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? **10** For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness.

This is a beautiful and important passage to consider especially when you are facing times of difficulty.

The analogy of our Heavenly Father’s chastening and that of an earthly father should not be pressed too far. An earthly father should seek to bring needed discipline and punishment as soon as it is required. If your child does something wrong, you shouldn’t wait a week before you bring the proper punishment and instruction. But does our Heavenly Father always bring us immediate correction when we fall into sin? A child who does something wrong can easily think that he is getting away with his sin if nothing is said or done right away. But such is not the case with our Father’s work in the life of His true children. God’s timing is perfect but not always predictable.

And this is where a Christian can fall into serious danger if he ever thinks that he is getting away with sin simply because God doesn’t bring immediate punishment. It is extremely dangerous to test the warnings of God’s Word.

Most of the warnings and instruction of the passage that we consider today don’t directly apply to us in the same way as for the original readers of this passage. But you are to see here the loving concern of Jesus Christ who gave these warnings for the well being of His

people. There are many other warnings in Scripture that do directly apply to you. Christ warns you for your good. Don't test the warnings of Scripture.

We will look at Matthew 24:15-28 in two parts. First, from verses 15-22, the warning to get out of Jerusalem. Second, from verses 23-28, don't be misled about Christ and His coming.

### **1. GET OUT OF JERUSALEM, vv. 15-22**

**Matt. 24:15** “Therefore when you see the ‘*abomination of desolation*,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), **16** “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. **17** Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. **18** And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. **19** But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! **20** And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. **21** For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. **22** And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Three weeks ago when we first started our study of Matthew 24, I mentioned that the disciples' questions to Jesus in verse 3, though perhaps uniformed, form a good outline for Matthew 24 and 25. I believe a very good argument can be made that Jesus in these chapters gives us a two-part answer to the questions of the disciples.

The first part of Jesus' answer deals with when the judgment of Jerusalem would take place. As we read in verse 34, a fearsome judgment would come upon Jerusalem and the temple within the next generation.

**Matt. 24:34** Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Starting with verse 36, I believe we are to see a transition in Jesus' answer. We are not given any time reference to when Jesus will return at the end of the age. In fact verse 36 states, **But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.**

Verses 14-28 are best understood then in the context of the fall of Jerusalem which started in A.D. 66. To try to directly apply these verses to our own age or some other age would be to distort the words of Jesus.

Listen to a summary of the history of this terrible time written by R. T. France.

The Jewish revolt began in A.D. 66, and during 67-68 the Roman commander Vespasian conquered most of Palestine. The Roman civil war in 68-69 led to a suspension of military operations in the East, but during that period Jerusalem was torn apart by its own civil war, as different Jewish parties battled for control, with the temple (the inner courts controlled by the Zealots under Eleazar and the

outer court by John of Gischala) at the center of the fighting. When eventually the Roman attack was resumed in 69, Jerusalem was already in a weakened and demoralized state. The rest of Judea was quickly reduced (apart from the strongholds of Herodium and Masada), and when Vespasian returned to Rome to take up his new office as emperor, his son Titus put Jerusalem under siege for five terrible months until the temple and much of the city were destroyed in the fall of A.D. 70.<sup>1</sup>

Verses 15-28 focus on this terrible period of history that involved not simply unbelieving Jews but also was a tremendous period of testing for God's true people. In verses 4-8, Jesus spoke of events that signaled the end had not yet come. But starting with verse 15 we see the beginning of the end for Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

In verse 15, Jesus gave a sign that signaled that it was time to leave Jerusalem and all of Judea. Flee to the mountains when you see this sign. What is the sign that Jesus gave that it was time to run? Verse 15 speaks of the **abomination of desolation**. What is this abomination of desolation or devastating pollution?<sup>3</sup> Well, as Jesus notes this expression comes from the book of Daniel.

We read earlier from Daniel 11. Daniel 11 is one of the greatest prophetic portions in all of Scripture. Daniel 11:31 reads,

**Dan. 11:31** And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily *sacrifices*, and place *there* the abomination of desolation (βδέλυγμα ἐρημώσεως).

This portion of Daniel's prophecy speaks of the actions of the evil ruler Antiochus Epiphanes and his forces. In 167 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem. The sacrifices of God's people were forbidden and in their place pagan sacrifices were offered. James Jordan argues that the actual abomination of desolation was not the actions of Antiochus and his soldiers or the idols that were erected but the blasphemous compromise of the priests who went along with Antiochus in the first place. They brought about the abomination of desolation.<sup>4</sup> Jordan's view is probably not the view of most commentators on this passage, but he may be making a very good point.

So what is the abomination of desolation that Jesus says has a connection with Daniel's prophecy? This is a difficult question. The end of verse 15 placed in parentheses calls for the reader to understand. It may be best not to try to look for one single event that can be called the abomination of desolation.<sup>5</sup> Listen to Luke 21:20.

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<sup>1</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 910.

<sup>2</sup> France, 910.

<sup>3</sup> France, 911.

<sup>4</sup> James Jordan, *Handwriting on the Wall*, 581.

<sup>5</sup> France, 913. Gentry doesn't point to any single event either, but speaks of a course of events.

**Luke 21:20** “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.

The Roman armies would eventually make their way into the temple and setup their ensigns and offer sacrifices in the temple.<sup>6</sup> Even before this there were horrible things that took place in the temple.

The Sicarri were named after the daggers they would use to murder people even in broad daylight.<sup>7</sup> The Sicarri were similar to modern-day terrorist, assassinating enemies, in broad daylight, and stirring up hatred.

One of the Jewish leaders at this time, a man named John of Gischala, invited 20,000 Idumean soldiers to come into the city and help him fight against other Jewish factions. 8,500 men lay dead in the temple after their massacre. Later when Roman forces surrounded the city, this same John of Gishcala took for his own use the sacred vessels of wine and oil.<sup>8</sup>

Josephus writes about the shedding of priestly blood in the temple area by Jewish Zealots. This he says was the abomination that invited the ultimate desolation of the temple.<sup>9</sup> The Zealots captured the temple and used the Holy Place of the temple as a base for their operations.<sup>10</sup>

With the start of trouble in A.D. 66 there was a short window of time for escape from Jerusalem until the spring of A.D. 68.<sup>11</sup> I mentioned earlier that after the Romans started to bring their armies against Jerusalem, there was a short period where they stopped their actions in Jerusalem because of civil war in Rome following the death of Nero. Some might think it was safe to continue to stay in Jerusalem. In fact, before the final siege of Jerusalem, it has been estimated that there were 2 million people in the city. But those who heard the warning of Jesus knew that there was no hope offered by Jerusalem. There would be no great deliverance for Jerusalem as there sometimes were in the past. **No, at the earliest sign of trouble, it was time to leave.** Those in Judea were to flee to the mountains. There is in these words of Jesus a connection with the apocryphal book of Maccabees where similar language is used for those who fled to the hills during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.<sup>12</sup>

So serious was the danger that Jesus in verses 17-18 advised not trying to in anyway pack up your stuff with you. Leave it behind. If you are on the roof, don't go back into your house. If you are in the field, don't go back to grab your cloak or other clothing. At that

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<sup>6</sup> Gentry, 94.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Moore, “A Brief Synopsis of the Fall of Jerusalem, 70 C.E.” Available at markmoore.com.

<sup>8</sup> Gentry, 94.

<sup>9</sup> Keener, 576.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Moore, “A Brief Synopsis of the Fall of Jerusalem, 70 C.E.” Available at markmoore.com

<sup>11</sup> Keener, 578.

<sup>12</sup> France, 914.

time you could come down from your rooftop without entering your house. As essential as the outer cloak would be, it was more important to run for your life.<sup>13</sup>

In verse 19 Jesus spoke of the difficulties that pregnant women and those nursing babies would especially experience. It is important to see here that the word **woe** is not used in the same way as it is repeatedly used in chapter 23. Here the word woe speaks of sorrow and points likely both to how difficult it would be to travel under these conditions and also the sorrow that would come to those whose babies would die in such extreme conditions.

In verse 20, Jesus spoke of two additional difficulties – traveling during the winter seasons and on the Sabbath. During the winter, parts of Israel can be very cold, especially in regions of higher elevation. The winter was also the time for rains and flooding, which obviously could make travel dangerous and difficult. Any attempt to leave the area of Jerusalem on the Sabbath would also be difficult because gates might be shut for the Sabbath; you also would have difficulty finding an animal for travel; additionally riding horseback on the Sabbath was considered an almost unforgiveable sin worthy of death.<sup>14</sup>

The time of Jerusalem's destruction, Jesus said, would be a great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

The heretic Harold Camping claims that the 'Great Tribulation' began in 1988 and will end in 20 days on May 21, 2011. He claims that the 'Great Tribulation' lasts 23 years. During this time, all Christians must leave their local churches which have come under the control of Satan.

The 'Great Tribulation' is not some future time of suffering but a description of the difficulties that both believing Jews and especially non-believing Jews faced from A.D. 66-70.

How great was the suffering of this period? The city and temple were literally left with not one stone left upon another stone. In summary, over 1.1 million were killed in the siege. Another 237,000 died in other places. At least 2,000 killed themselves. 97,000 were taken as captives, and countless others were killed in other cruel means. Just 5 months before the siege, the city was crowded with 2,000,000 people who boasted of the city's great strength.<sup>15</sup>

More people have died in other wars or times of periods of genocide. But D. A. Carson does observe that never has so high a percentage of a city's population been so thoroughly and painfully exterminated as during the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> And Jesus' words aren't just understood in terms of a body count or some other measure of human woe and suffering. Jesus' words also speak of the theological significance of the fall of Jerusalem. No other calamity suffered by the Jews or other groups can be compared to the theological

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<sup>13</sup> Keener, 579.

<sup>14</sup> Keener, 580.

<sup>15</sup> George Peter Holford, *The Destruction of Jerusalem*, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> Cited by Gentry, 96

significance of the destruction of the temple and the total end of the OT system of worship.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, here, from verse 22 we observe Jesus' words that so terrible would this time of suffering be, that God determined for the sake of His elect to shorten this period of suffering. **How terrible was this time of siege and suffering?** How hungry would you have to be in order to eat leather? How hungry would you have to be to steal food from a child or elderly person? Josephus records that children were eaten by their mothers even as Deut. 28 prophesies. The absolute horror of the siege of Jerusalem was made more bearable by the fact that it lasted only 5 months. Even the Romans were amazed at how quickly the siege came to an end. The general Titus said that God was against the Jews.<sup>18</sup>

### **3. DON'T BE MISLED, vv. 23-27**

**Matt. 24:23** "Then if anyone says to you, "Look, here *is* the Christ!" or "There!" do not believe *it*. **24** For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. **25** See, I have told you beforehand. **26** "Therefore if they say to you, "Look, He is in the desert!" do not go out; *or* "Look, He is in the inner rooms!" do not believe *it*. **27** For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. **28** For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

Times of crisis become opportunities both for true leaders and for false prophets and false leaders.

Ken Gentry points out that Jesus' words of warning are made more understandable based on the interpretation that some Jews had of OT passages like Isaiah 66:7 and Micah 5:3.

**Is. 66:7** Before she was in labor, she gave birth;  
Before her pain came,  
She delivered a male child.

Some Jewish rabbis argued based on this verse that the Messiah would be manifested before the destruction of Jerusalem.

**Mic. 5:3** Therefore He shall give them up,  
Until the time *that* she who is in labor has given birth;  
Then the remnant of His brethren  
Shall return to the children of Israel.

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<sup>17</sup> Gentry, 97

<sup>18</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Robertson's Word Pictures of the NT*, s.v. Matthew 24:22.

Based on this verse, some argued that the Messiah, the Son of David, would not come until the wicked empire, the Romans, would spread their reign over the whole world for nine months.

During the decade of the 60's for Jews who rejected the true Messiah, there was a strong belief that the Messiah was soon to come.

So very appropriately Jesus warned against such foolish ideas that might even trouble the elect.<sup>19</sup> Josephus writes of various leaders, Messiahs of sorts, who claimed that they could show miraculous proofs, which would support their claims.<sup>20</sup>

Some of these false Messiahs setup their operations in the wilderness or desert as verse states. Others secretly operated as it were from inner rooms. But in tremendous contrast to these false claims, **Jesus declared that there is no sign that will be needed when He returns in power and glory for the final time.** That is why Jesus doesn't give us any signs for His final coming. You won't need any sign announcing His final coming. For it will be as obvious as a massive bolt of lightning that streaks across the sky from the east and flashes to the west. This is how obvious it will be when Jesus comes at the end of time. Anyone who claims that they can predict the day of his coming is a blasphemous liar. Anyone who says that they believe Jesus is coming soon because of signs that they have observed or things they read in the newspaper or on someone's Facebook status is equally deceived and dangerous.

The final verse of this section, I think is best understood as another example supporting the idea that it will be completely obvious when Jesus returns at the end of time. You don't need someone to point out where the carcass is. Look for the swarming vultures or eagles. In a similar manner it will be completely clear when Jesus does return at the end of time.

## CONCLUSION:

It is hard to judge all of the records from the past, but Eusebias the early church historian recorded that the fact that many Jewish Christians did believe these strong warnings of Jesus, fled Jerusalem, and travelled about 50 miles northeast to the city of Pella in the Jordan valley area.<sup>21</sup> (The city of Pella, IA is named after this city founded by Dutch immigrants who were also looking for a place of refuge.)<sup>22</sup> There is debate about the

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<sup>19</sup> Gentry, 101.

<sup>20</sup> France, 917. See *Ant.* 18.85; 20.97, 168, 170; *War* 2.259.

<sup>21</sup> "The people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ travelled from Jerusalem, so that when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judaea, the judgment of God might at last overtake them for all their crimes against the Christ and his Apostles, and all that generation of the wicked be utterly blotted out from among men." Eusebias, *Hist. eccl.* 3.5.3.

<sup>22</sup> P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, "Fleeing Forward: The Departure Of Christians From Jerusalem To Pella." *Westminster Theological Journal* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 182.

historical accuracy of Eusebias, but based on the warnings here of Jesus there is good reason to believe that Eusebias has accurately recorded one of the ways that Christians were preserved in obedience to the words of Jesus.

As I mentioned earlier, the application of this passage is not in an entirely direct manner except for the words of instruction in verse 27. But you are to see again the loving concern of Jesus Christ who never warns in vain. There are many other warnings in Scripture that do directly apply to you. Christ warns you for your good. Don't test the warnings of Scripture.

**John 15:9** “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

**10** If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

As I have mentioned before, I believe we are to see a connection between the judgment on Jerusalem and the final judgment and return of Christ. The one is a foreshadowing of the other.

Last week we looked at 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” The knowledge of this certain judgment is not designed to make a believer despair over his salvation. The knowledge of this certain judgment is not designed to make you fear death. Rather the knowledge of this certain judgment is so that while God gives you life you will use it as much as possible to truly please Christ rather than living simply for your own temporary pleasures.

We don't to be afraid of some future Great Tribulation though as a people and nation we might certainly pass through a time of great judgment. Even more, if you are trusting in Christ, if you are abiding in Him, then there is no reason to be in terror of the Last Judgment. In the Lord's Supper we celebrate that the fact that we have passed from judgment to the blessing of God's peace and presence.

### **BENEDICTION – HEBREWS 13:20-21**

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.