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End of the World. Matthew 24:3

By Elder Keith Ellis

"And as he sat upon 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?"

Matthew 24:3

This verse is one of the favorites of the modern day gloom and doom preachers. Next to John three sixteen, it happens to be one of the most abused and misused verses in the entire Bible.

Once this verse is taken in its proper context, and context is maintained, its message becomes clear and we see a very descriptive answer to the disciple's questions. Look closely at this verse and what it is saying. It is a key to help us understand the verses which follow.

From the Mount of Olives, which was eastward from the temple, one could obtain a very good view of the temple and the portions of the city which surrounded it. No doubt Jesus chose this place on purpose to inform his disciples about the things which would come upon the city and the temple in the near future. But we can be certain as our Lord described these things everyone had a clear view of the subject matter at hand.

Now the scripture is careful to tell us the disciples came to Jesus privately. Now I know from experience this is important information for us to consider. The word "*private*" was not placed in the text as filler material. It conveys to us the fact this message was not intended for the multitudes at that time. For if it had been, Jesus had ample opportunities to speak it to the crowd which usually followed Him where ever He went. It may be necessary for us to remember at this point one of the basic rudiments of Bible study demands we consider "*who*" is doing the speaking and "*who*" is being addressed. It would be so easy for us to overlook this if we were not careful. So we know it is Jesus who is doing the speaking. And in the parallel messages to the same story we are now discussing we find Mark records for us the names of the disciples who came to Jesus and entered into a private conversation with Him. They were, Peter, James, John and Andrew. Mark also adds they came and petitioned Christ privately. This is recorded for us so we may not mistake "*who*" is being addressed.

The discourse given by Jesus in Matthew twenty three was in public for all to hear. The context of Matthew chapter twenty-four is discussed in a private conversation. It was not intended for the public at that time. It is vital for us to understand this point.

Their questions begin by asking, "*when shall these things be?*" What things? The destruction of the temple, and its demolition. This is what the context of Matthew twenty-four is concerning.

Next they ask, "*and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?*"

Most people when they hear the phrase "*the coming of The Lord*" automatically think of the second coming, the consummation of all things. This is what we have been taught most of our lives. But this is a very worldly and narrow minded view of the Bible doctrine regarding the "*comings of The Lord.*" The "*coming*" under consideration in Matthew twenty-four verse three is not a literal, physical appearing of Jesus, but rather is figurative coming. Rather Jesus coming to execute wrath on the Jews. Later in this work I will address the scripture as it refers to God "*coming.*" You probably will be surprised as to what the scripture actually teaches on this point.

God had earlier judged Jerusalem. In this "*coming*" of Christ, the sentence would be carried out. This is what is designed! The execution of the wrath of God is what will take place at that time. Of course we know how God did this.

(See Luke 21:20-22)

The disciples ask, "*What shall be the sign of thy coming?*" Or what things will we see to know your coming is upon us? Jesus goes into detail describing the events which will lead up to that time. In essence these events bear witness to the fact the kingdom of God is at hand. The Old Covenant vanished and the new was established. (See Hebrews 8:13) This is a time of reformation. Not like that of Luther and Calvin, but God rending the kingdom from the Jews and giving it to the Gentiles. (See Matthew 21:43 and Hebrews 9:10) Hear what Christ says on a different occasion concerning the coming of His kingdom;

"Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

Matthew 16:28

Of course the word "*see*" should not be taken for granted to mean "*eye contact.*" In some places in the New Testament it does. But for the New Testament, Strong's Concordance gives approximately eight different renderings for the word '*see.*'

In Matthew sixteen verse twenty eight the word in the Greek is '*eido*' and it means to '*perceive*' or "*have knowledge*" or '*understand*' something. Those who are referred to in Matthew sixteen verse twenty eight were sure to '*know*' and '*understand*' who was responsible for the events Jesus said they would '*see*' before they would taste death. They would '*know*' it was the Son of man coming in his kingdom and power which permitted the Roman armies of Titus to move against Jerusalem and the temple. So what this text is actually saying is there were some of that very generation who were alive during Jesus's ministry on earth which would not die until they had seen the power of God manifested, the temple, its sacrifices, Jerusalem and the remaining unbelieving Jews destroyed. (See Matthew 23:34-36) This manifestation is referred to as the kingdom of God in power. And we can now know for certain it was not a future generation which Jesus was referring to but the one which was alive between AD 26 and AD 70. I will write more on this later.

The next thirty one verses of Matthew twenty four deal with this very thing. Christ sets forth the signs and events which would lead up to this "coming of Christ." The vengeance of God would be upon the disobedient Jews for the shed blood of all the righteous prophets, and above all for their rejection and crucifixion of The Lord of Glory. (See Luke 21:22) But keep in mind this "*coming of The Lord*" is not literal, but figurative. I will undertake to show this from a Biblical standpoint later.

Matthew twenty-four verse three ends by saying, "*and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?*"

Before we go any further it is necessary to inspect the word 'world' as it is used in this text. The language of this verse is taken for granted by vast multitudes without giving it a second thought. Let us not make the same mistake.

The Greek word for 'world' as used in Matthew twenty-four verse three is 'aion.' Another rendering for the word 'world' as found in scripture is "*kosmos*." The only other rendering for the word 'world' as used in the New Testament is the Greek word 'oikoumene.'

The word 'world' appears three times in Matthew twenty-four. Each time it appears it is a different rendering. This should cause us to take notice that the same thing is not being conveyed by the word each time it is used.

The first time the word world is used in verse three it is the word '*anion*.' In Strong's exhaustive concordance it is key number 165 for the Greek dictionary of the New Testament. It means "*an age,*"; '*perpetuation,*'; "*a Messianic period,*" "*an age, course, eternal.*"

Verse fourteen the word is '*oikoumene*' is keyed as 3625 in the Greek dictionary. It means, '*land,*'; '*globe,*'; "*specifically the Roman empire.*" This indicates for us the entire world was not intended in verse fourteen, but rather the Roman Empire.

Verse twenty one the word is '*kosmos*' is key 2889 in the Greek dictionary and means "*orderly arrangement,*"; "*the world including its inhabitants.*"

As we progress you will see the importance of defining the word world. You can see it does not always mean the same thing. The modern day mind set usually thinks the word world is "*all inclusive,*" or includes everyone and everything. This is not always the case. One way of helping us to come to understand the word is not always "*all inclusive*" is to think of things we deal with each day of our lives. For instance many of us have dealings with the *financial world*. Others are involved with the *sports world*. We may speak of the *world of medicine*, or perhaps we know someone involved in the *world of politics* or in the *fashion world*. I know you could add to this list from your own experience.

At this point I want to address the word as it is used in verse three. I have an Interlinear Bible which I find to be quite helpful. For those not familiar with what it is I will briefly explain. It is a Bible which has the Hebrew or Greek languages in the main columns. Each

word in the original language has its English translation directly above the original. This is very helpful in that you do not need to spend a lot of time determining the Greek words. I want to quote Matthew twenty-four verse three from the Interlinear Bible to give you an idea of how the verse, before arranged by translators sounds.

"Sitting and He on the Mount of Olives, came up to Him the disciples privately, saying, Tell us, when these things will be; and what the sign of your presence, and of the termination of the age?"

Of course you can see the reason the King James translators took the effort to arrange the flow of the text. But more importantly here we need to notice two things. First the King James uses the word 'coming' and the Greek uses the word 'presence.' This puts an entirely different light on the word. Even today we speak of, experience, and anticipate God's presence among us. If the disciples understood they would literally see Jesus during this 'coming,' they would not have asked for a sign as evidence of His presence. **You ask for a sign as confirmation when you lack physical evidence.** So the disciples now knew when they saw all the things come to pass which Jesus mentioned here that He would be 'present.' Was God present in the fulfillment of His wrath upon Jerusalem in A. D. 70?

Secondly the word 'world' as used in verse three is properly rendered as 'age.' Also it was the completion or termination of the age about which the disciples were inquiring. We will be able to see as we get further into Matthew twenty-four that the 'end' which is under consideration is the end of the Jewish economy, the law service, the end of the temple, its sacrifices, the city of Jerusalem, and the end of an age of disobedience and rebellion of those who boasted themselves as Abraham's seed. **It does not refer to the end of time or the end of the 'kosmos.'** Daniel refers to it as the time of the end.

Some preachers of other persuasions have been frank enough to tell me they know the popular end time theory in Matthew chapter twenty-four in reality teaches the destruction of the temple and related subjects, but they do not preach it because it is not what the people want to hear. And others preach the popular version simply because it is very profitable for them. God forbid we should find ourselves in such a position. Remember **in context**, Matthew twenty-four is speaking about the things which would lead up to the destruction of the temple.

God forbid the day we begin to fear the people, and lose sight of the fact it is God who tries our hearts.