

## The Duty of a Priest and Matthew 24:2 By Elder Keith Ellis

"And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."  
Matthew 24:2

The disciples receive an answer to their plea for preserving the temple. Jesus begins by asking them, "See ye not all these things?" Don't you understand? Have you no understanding of the law and the prophets? Do not they clearly tell you this should take place? Although the disciples audibly heard the statements He made concerning Jerusalem and its impending doom they had no understanding or spiritual insight. Listen! He says. The temple and those who are in charge of its services God The Father has judged and found to be unfit for the true service of God. There is a festering leprosy within the temple. See Chapter twenty three again. Recall the time Jesus went into the temple and made a whip and began to drive the moneychangers out. He says;

"...Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations a house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves."  
Mark 11:17

The context of Jesus' statement is easy to determine once we do some investigation. Of course we know the temple had an area set aside to offer sacrifices as the Law of Moses required. Most often an individual would bring a sacrifice and most often the priest in charge pronounces the sacrifice to have a blemish. In such a case the priest would direct the individual to an area of the temple where they could find acceptable sacrifices for sell. They could "*trade in*" their unacceptable animal for a fraction of its worth. This animal was more than likely re-sold as an acceptable offering to the next person who came along. It was more than likely sold at a tremendous profit. Before you could buy anything in the temple you had to use temple money. If you had common currency it must be exchanged. For a fee of only 10% you could obtain the temple money necessary to purchase your sacrifice. Hence we see the reason why Jesus likened the crowd in the temple to a den of thieves. This is probably just a small example of the dealings which took place in the temple. No wonder Jesus overturned their money tables, and made a whip to drive them out. Twice. (See John 2:14-16, Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-19 and Luke 19:45-48)

Jesus knew exactly what should be taking place in the temple, yet it was not happening. In fact the services and the temple were polluted by the sins of the people. This brings us to one of the duties of a priest.

Leprosy is figurative of sin. As a priest Jesus had a duty to fulfill concerning the house of God. (Christ was a priest of another order, but he still fulfilled the law.) We read about the laws concerning leprosy in Leviticus chapter fourteen. If someone had a home in which there was leprosy, the priest was to come and then commanded everyone out of the house. It was to be determined if the plague was deeper than the surface of the walls. The house would be shut up for seven days and then the priest would come again. If the leprosy was found to be spreading, then the priest was to command the stones of the house which had the leprosy be removed. And the house was to be scraped and cleaned within. And if after all this, the plague returned;

"He shall break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the house; and he shall carry them forth out of the city into an unclean place."

Leviticus 14:45

All the righteous prophets who came before Jesus spoke against the corruption of the children of Israel. Though until John the Baptist came on the scene there was a period of four hundred years in which there was no message from God. Four Hundred years of darkness. This is generally referred to as the period of the Macabees. During this time no doubt the activities in the temple deteriorated and sunk to a very low level. The leprosy of sin was allowed to fester in the temple. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life were the elements which guided the hypocritical services in the temple service. To say God was displeased with the things which happened there would be putting it mildly. Those things were an abomination to God. This text teaches what Jesus actually did in some of the visits to the temple. In His discourse in Matthew twenty three He proclaims the iniquity or "fretting leprosy" of the scribes and Pharisees. The sinfulness of the established authorities who had been charged with the oracles of God had permeated to the very foundations of the building. And it should go without saying if the foundation is corrupt, the walls also will be corrupt. Hence we find the entire structure (system) was infected with leprosy. (Sin) Therefore it was necessary for the building to be destroyed.

So upon His final departure from the temple He declares its desolation. As a priest He declares its uncleanness. Although the destruction was not immediate, its days were numbered. God had once promised to place His name there and meet with His people there. But no longer! I am sure from the reading of the Old Testament that the long-suffering of God was quite evident while awaiting the earthly ministry of Christ. God does things orderly. He awaited Christ to fulfill that which was written in the scripture. Once this was accomplished, the glory of God departed from the temple. **Christ is the glory of God.**

*"Ichabod, the glory is departed from Israel."*

(See 1 Samuel 4:21)

When Christ said there would not be left one stone upon another that would not be thrown down, that is exactly what He meant. Also in fulfillment of the priestly duty spelled out in Leviticus, we find history records for us how the costly stones of the temple were removed from the temple site to an unclean place.

In Matthew chapter twenty-four verse two He states the stones of the temple will be thrown down completely. And this tells how what Jeremiah had prophesied would come to pass.

"...Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become as heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."  
Jeremiah 26:18

This same statement is echoed in Micah. Here he prophesies telling us that for the blood of Zion, the iniquity of Jerusalem, the corruption of the judges of Israel, the priests becoming hirelings, and the prophets divining for money, Jerusalem would be laid waste. This is basically the same thing Christ tells the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew chapter twenty three. Micah tells us because of these things:

"Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."  
Micah 3:12

He says Zion will be plowed for the sake of the people. This was so the New Jerusalem could be manifested to the people of God. Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, was an eye witness to the fulfillment of many of the events prophesied by Jesus in the Olivet discourse. He reports the city and the temple were actually dug up and laid level with the ground in fulfillment of the statement made by Christ in verse two of Matthew chapter twenty-four. Matthew Henry in his commentary on this verse refers to a man by the name of Turnus Rufus who was seen actually ploughing up the ground on which the temple once stood. It is noted that in order for this to take place the stones of the temple would have had to been removed.

Through further study we will learn exactly how each stone of this marvelous building was literally thrown down where there was not a single stone left standing upon another.

It is said many of the stones of the temple were very beautiful, expensive marble. Once Titus had conquered the city, his soldiers plundered the gifts of the temple. More than likely these expensive stones could have been used in another building in an "unclean place." Any place outside of Israel was considered an unclean place.

"For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with 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."  
Luke 19:43-44

Of course this familiar passage is where Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. (See Luke 19:41) This also echoes the same truths mentioned by Jesus in Matthew twenty three. It tells

us in no uncertain terms one reason for Jerusalem's destruction is the inability of the people to recognize Christ as Messiah, or "*the time of their visitation.*"

The Jews were under the dominion of the Romans during the times of the ministry of Jesus. They were enemies. The Jews were a constant headache to those placed in charge by Rome to oversee and rule Jerusalem and its inhabitants. The Jewish people expected physical deliverance at any time by the Messiah, to relieve them of their Roman oppressors. Yet they certainly did not expect the rejection of one they considered a radical or false prophet would land them into the hands of their enemies. The conditions between the two peoples would eventually degenerate into the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, which event God ordered. The things spoken here by Christ further establish the time context for Matthew chapter twenty-four.

In Revelation chapter eleven verse one John is told to rise and measure the temple of God and them which worship therein. This was not so God could know the physical dimensions of the temple, but to show the fact that neither the temple service nor the people who worshipped there measured up to the standard which God required. He is told not to measure the court which is without. This "*court which is without*" indicates the court of the Gentiles. This is Herod's temple which is under consideration. The outer court was a distinctive design of Herods. This is the temple which was marked out for destruction by Christ Himself. This brings up an interesting point. If this is Herods temple which is mentioned here, and it is, then we can see how it would have to be measured before its destruction and not after. The temple was destroyed in AD 70. If the book of Revelation was written in AD 92-95 as many say then this is yet another verse which makes no sense when viewed in a future time context. If the book were written before AD 70, which date precedes the destruction of the temple, it becomes much more consistent with the whole of scripture. It makes more sense to measure the temple and its worshippers before it was destroyed than after. In fact one of the reasons they were destroyed was because they did not measure up.