

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 79, Chapter 24

Before we dive into Matthew chapter 24, I think it is best to first offer you an exposition and summary of not only what we have learned thus far in Matthew about the crucial role that Jesus plays in Redemption History, but also what we will learn in the coming chapters. After all, is not His entire purpose as the Redeemer our one and only hope of having peace with God?

What we've been doing for 78 lessons is creating pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, which when assembled reveal the entire image that the pieces are cut from. I understand that the larger the puzzle the more challenging it is to fit those pieces into something coherent. It would be much easier for us if redemption weren't such a complex matter that encompasses so much more time and history than is covered in the Gospel accounts. Yet if we cannot construct this puzzle in a way so as to arrive at a meaningful point and end that changes our understanding and our lives, then all that we've been reading and studying amounts to little more than a series of interesting short-stories about Jesus.

So the question becomes how to create a framework for understanding a matter that is so immense in its scope as God's plan of redemption and Yeshua's role in it. I believe that such a framework can be best formed by characterizing the various historical mile marker events as the "stages along the way" of Redemption History as opposed to listing a series of individual, encapsulated generations each having expiration dates.

Most pertinent to our study of the Gospel of Matthew is how Yeshua self-defines His purpose as the Son of Man and places Himself exactly where He fits in the cosmic puzzle of the redemptive plan of His Father. But in order to understand

the role of the Son of Man in this plan, and the "when" of His appearance and activities, we must turn to the Book of Daniel. Christ's firm recorded conviction that He, Himself, is that Son of Man... something He calls Himself numerous times... and that He is taking His cues about both the timing in prophetic history and the purpose for His existence, comes from the Prophet Daniel. When we work our way through Matthew chapter 24 we will encounter this passage:

CJB **Matt 24:14-16** <sup>14</sup> ***And this Good News about the Kingdom will be announced throughout the whole world as a witness to all the Goyim. It is then that the end will come.*** <sup>15</sup> ***"So when you see the abomination that causes devastation spoken about through the prophet Dani'el standing in the Holy Place" (let the reader understand the allusion),*** <sup>16</sup> ***"that will be the time for those in Y'hudah to escape to the hills.***

The vital point we must constantly maintain within our vision is that Yeshua's validation as possessing the persona as the divine Son of Man happens within the context of a fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel. In order to help us get a better handle on this matter of the timing and the role of the mysterious character called the Son of Man, let's read Daniel chapter 7 where this is foretold.

## **READ DANIEL CHAPTER 7 all**

Daniel was one of the many thousands of Jewish exiles of the Babylonian conquest of Judah. He was in Babylon serving King Belshatzar at the time when he had a dream-vision that utterly unnerved him. It included strange animals that we could rightly call monsters, which symbolized something that would appear sometime in the future. His vision revealed that several kingdoms (empires, really) would be established and then overthrown by the next one to follow until this Son of Man finally made His appearance. He would come in the clouds, and would also be led into the presence of the Ancient of Days (another term for God the Father). The Father would then establish His own kingdom on Planet Earth, with the Son of Man as its ruler (acting as the Father's agent). Unlike the previous 4 kingdoms, each of which existed only for a time, this new Kingdom of Heaven would endure forever and never be overthrown. Even more, the real ruler over these previous 4 kingdoms (which we take to be Satan) ***will be stripped of his rulership, which will be consumed and completely destroyed*** (Dan. 7:26 CJB). What this is talking about is what Christianity calls the End Times when Satan and his demons are thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is something that the Jews also believed would happen, although they gave it different names such as

the End of Days or The World to Come (*olam habah* in the Jews' native tongue).

In a much-studied work from the 1<sup>st</sup> century called the Assumption of Moses, also known as the Ascension of Moses, we get a glimpse into the beliefs of its Jewish writer (who was not a follower Christ) about the End Times. Before I give you a short quote from that work, I'm afraid I need to hit you with a scholarly word that is important to our study of the stages of Redemption History. That word is **eschatology**. This term comes from 2 Greek words that mean "last" and "study". So it is the study of last things, or as Christianity has adopted, the study of "End Times". The word was coined because there has always been wide disagreement within both Judaism and Christianity over which last things occur when, and whom they are associated with. Eschatology, then, is a term used to indicate the study of most anything and anyone that is thought to be associated with End Times matters.

Of the many emails that I receive, some of the most frequent ask me such things as "are we in the End Times?" "When will the Tribulation happen?" "When does the Rapture occur and what does it look like?" "When, exactly, does Messiah return?" In other words, who among us as God worshippers and Bible Believers doesn't wish we had been given a precise, exhaustive biblical flow-chart and a well-defined timeline of Redemption History and of the End Times events? Keep on wishing! The Jews of Yeshua's era and before were just as interested in such things, and so of course formed their own End Times beliefs, which is why the Book of Daniel played such a prominent role in the minds of even the common Jews, but especially so in the minds of the religious Zealots. The occupation of Rome over the Jews' homeland made most Holy Land Jews certain that they were already living in the End Times. Thus for them the End, which included Judgment Day, was at hand. Obviously, they were wrong. Or were they?

Because of the Christian New Testament (which didn't come into existence until nearly 2 centuries after Christ's time on earth... or until around 150 years after Paul's death), it is usually the Gospel writer John that is given credit for giving us the best understanding of the timing and the sequence of End Times events in his most famous work, the Book of Revelation (which he wrote not long before he passed away towards the end of the 1st century). However well before that time, it was Jesus that added new dimensions to our understanding of the stages of Redemption History, and thus **when** certain important events would occur, and most importantly to nearly every Jew and every Christian, when the End would finally arrive and what were the signs that it was near. Very interestingly,

Yeshua's understanding and timeline did have several similarities to what was already believed within early Judaism. Here now is that quote from the Assumption of Moses.

***"And then shall (God's) Kingdom appear throughout all His creation; and then shall the Devil meet his end, and sorrow shall depart with him."***

The question that immediately confronts us is when is the "then" that this Jewish writer about the Apocalypse had in mind? "When" is what we all want to know. Remembering that this was written during or near the time of Jesus, it is clear that this Jewish writer was expecting some major change in history to occur... the end of history to be more specific... but for him it was in the future and not imminent. Yet in fact his belief was NOT the mainstream Jewish belief of the times, and it was also NOT the belief of Christ's 12 disciples and NOT of John the Baptist. All of these folks were fully expecting the prophesied coming of God's Kingdom and the defeat of Rome, and of the Devil's destruction, and of the fulfillment of Daniel's prophetic vision, and of the great Judgment, to happen immediately... or at least within their lifetimes.

So, then, can we create a flow-chart of the stages of Redemption History to better help us decipher it and get us a little closer to the "when" of End Times events? I think we can. It would look something like this.

- 1) Creation to the Fall of Adam.
- 2) The Fall to Noah.
- 3) Noah to Abraham.
- 4) Abraham to Moses.
- 5) Moses to John the Baptist.
- 6) John the Baptist to the end of the Millennial Kingdom.
- 7) The re-creation of the heavens and earth

In truth, we could probably divide that 6<sup>th</sup> stage into two: From John the Baptist to the return of Christ who inaugurates His 1000-year reign (known as the Millennial

Kingdom) as its own stage, and then a separate stage that is the 1000-year reign itself, which comes prior to the new heavens and earth, thus giving us 8 stages of Redemption History instead of 7. I'll explain this flow chart, but before that I must say something to try to smooth out some of the speed bumps that can happen when studying End Times events (eschatology) from most any teacher, because every writer and teacher that presents his or her thoughts on the matter will speak of eras, or dispensations, or generations... and give them names or titles along with beginning and terminating event markers. I suppose I'm doing no less. However where I differ with many of them is this: first, dividing things up into eras and stages involves a level of arbitrary choices and it is simply our human way of trying to explain the complex and the mysterious. Dividing things up into more bite-sized chunks to try to examine them individually in order to help make sense of it all can be helpful. Yet, I have no doubt that God would not see what He is doing in Redemption History as being a series of named stages or eras.

My second difference is that despite my own flow-chart that seems to mark beginnings and endings of various stages, by no means is it my intent to communicate some sharp lines in the sands of time. Or that everything that comes before a new named stage is subsequently replaced, abolished and made irrelevant. Rather, the mental picture I wish to impart is as if there were named mile markers placed beside a long winding river upon which we were riding the unstoppable current. The river never stops flowing or changes course simply because we place some convenient mile markers on its shores, nor will we ever find a firm line running across those waters that someone has placed there saying that we've crossed from one stage of the river to another. Nor that what came before any of the mile markers ceases to exist if we look over our shoulder once we've passed by it. If any of the stages we had already passed by did suddenly cease to exist, then the source of water for the flowing river would end as though a dam were erected. The flow of water (the flow of Redemption History) would necessarily stop and so everything that lay ahead on the river would dry up, and that would be the end of our ride upon those waters.

Let me give you another analogy for the mental picture I hope you'll adopt, using child development. Even the Bible speaks of stages of child development, however I'll use more modern terminology. We begin with fetus, then newborn, infant, toddler, middle childhood, adolescence, and finally young adulthood. This represents a flow, and not sharply defined stages that have hard start and stop points. Also, each new stage of child development does not abolish or make irrelevant the ones before it. Rather the physical, mental and emotional

development of a child that often happens nearly imperceptibly, tiny steps by tiny steps, is the result of the next stage growing atop, and on account of, all that was learned and retained from the previous stages.

However, contrary to this concept of a flow of history, the highly popularized system within Evangelical Christianity of the generations of Redemption History called Dispensations (and there are other systems like it as well) defines each generation as though they can stand alone and independent. What came before the most current stage vanishes and Redemption History hits the RESET button. To say it another way, we can see what happened during a previous stage that brought us to this new stage, but when this new stage began it's as if it broke all connections and bonds to the previous ones. The previous generations or stages are to be forgotten and pushed aside as obsolete if not now alien to our current existence. Therefore the only purpose of any of the stages is to get us to the next one. Each stage is depicted and defined as a full replacement of the previous one. Thus with such a mindset was born the errant Christian doctrine that each of God's Covenants replaces the one that came before it; the idea being that only one Covenant at a time can be in operation in any one Dispensation or generation. The Covenant of Noah therefore became irrelevant and replaced by the Covenant of Abraham. The Covenant of Abraham became irrelevant and replaced with the Covenant of Moses. The Covenant of Moses became irrelevant and replaced by the New Covenant, the Covenant of Christ. I strongly disagree with that entire mode of thinking because that is not at all how God's Word operates; it's not how Covenants operate, nor is it what the Bible depicts. Each stage of Redemption History (each Covenant in this illustration) only works properly if all the memory and substance of what came prior to it is retained and used as a building block in a stack of building blocks.

So what we arrive at is this: was **everything** that Jesus taught about the End Times meant only for an undetermined future time? Or was His advent in the 1st century a sign that the End Times was underway? What I've just described to you is not only the crux of debate and doctrine about Redemption History within the modern Church, it was the crux of debate and doctrine on the same subject among the Jew's of Yeshua's day. Let's take a couple of the stages of my Redemption History flow chart to help us examine this rather large and challenging question. I'll begin by very briefly offering a sketch of what each stage represents. And remember, these stages are of my own concoction and created only for the purpose of illustration to help us to understand the totality of Redemption History and Yeshua's place within it.



Creation up to the Fall of Adam is essentially the period when all of God's Creation was operating within the perfection that He created it. We're not going to get into a debate over the length of time it may have been. Rather, the idea is that the first stage of Redemption History marks its place with the Fall of Adam, when God's perfect Creation was ruined by human sin. Thus, stage 1 created the NEED for redemption and set into motion all the future stages that would follow to satisfy this need.

Stage 2, Adam to Noah, represents a period when the result of the Fall was that wickedness increased so greatly that God decided to purge it from the earth. He used a calamitous flood as that purging mechanism. He saved the only 8 people from death out of all humanity (those few that He deemed righteous) as the seed corn to begin humanity anew.

Stage 3, Noah to Abraham, represents a time when all the world was essentially gentiles. That is, there was only one type or category of people. Each people group of gentiles had again become wicked and each chose its own god or gods to worship and developed its own set of rules and ethics and morals to live by. With Abraham, God made a Covenant that set one particular man apart from all others to inaugurate a special people group meant to serve only the One True God.

Stage 4, Abraham to Moses. This special people group begun with Abraham in time became the 12 tribes of Israel (the 12 sons of Jacob, who was a grandson of Abraham). This people group worshipped God, but their worship and their lifestyles soon became much like the people around them. Because of a famine up in Canaan where they were residing, they wound up in Egypt to survive where, under the protection of Jacob's son Joseph and then his immediate successors, they grew into enormous numbers. The Egyptian Pharaohs that came later enslaved them and made their lives bitter under forced labor.

Stage 5, Moses to John the Baptist. God rescued the enslaved Israelites from Egypt. This was God's first act of redemption in Redemption History. Once all Israel was redeemed, God gave to Moses (Israel's leader) His laws and commands for them to live by that covered virtually every area of their lives including their relationships with God and with their fellow man. However over the centuries these laws and commands were perverted and twisted by Israel's leaders, effectively replacing God's laws with their own. John the Baptist appeared and announced that a Redeemer had arrived to redeem Israel not so

much from a political oppressor (Rome) but rather from their own sins of breaking the Law of Moses.

Stage 6, John the Baptist to the end of the Millennial Kingdom. The Redeemer that John announced was Yeshua, and Yeshua represented the second redemption. He was also Daniel's Son of Man. John proclaimed that the appearance of this man represented the time for the Jews to repent of their sins. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of Heaven had broken through because of John, and the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven was the Gospel that He preached. It can be argued that since the Millennial Kingdom is but the Kingdom of Heaven operating on earth at its fullest, then even though the Kingdom of Heaven exists on earth now, beginning with John the Baptist, it is still maturing. So then from John the Baptist to the **end** of the Millennial Kingdom is but one lengthy stage that is characterized by the existence of the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet I think a better way to view it is that from John the Baptist to the **beginning** of the Millennial Kingdom (that is marked by the return of the Redeemer, Jesus) is its own separate stage is more helpful. So while the Kingdom of Heaven is indeed here now, it is yet nowhere near all it will be after Christ returns to purge the entire planet of all evil people. Once that occurs, then there will be 1000 years of Yeshua personally ruling Planet Earth as it's King, there will be peace on earth and goodwill abounding among men, and thus the Kingdom of Heaven will be operating in all its fullness. And yet, wickedness will again raise its ugly head and need to be purged.

Stage 7 (or 8, if you prefer) is the re-created heavens and earth. The current Universe as we know it (Earth included) will be melted back to its elements and re-formed (this is found in Revelation chapter 21). Even the Devil will no longer exist. Thus from that moment forward, all will be eternal. Time comes to an end. There will be no evil or sin or death present in the re-creation. No longer will there be decaying of matter. It will be like an eternal Garden of Eden, only better, because there will be no possibility of a fall. All barriers between Heaven and Earth will be taken down; Earth and Heaven will meld together as one. Redemption History is completed.

Getting back now to that 6th stage of Redemption History that is marked by the appearance of the desert wild man, John, Jesus said concerning the Kingdom of Heaven: ***if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you! (Matt. 12:28 CJB)*** So there can be no doubt that the primary **visible proof** of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth was



Yeshua driving out demons from people by the power of the Spirit of God. Yet the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven certainly did not mean that the Devil was completely defeated, even though the coupling of those 2 events was central to Jewish belief at that time. Since we know in retrospect that the coming of the Son of Man (Yeshua) did not bring with Him the immediate destruction of the Devil, this means that it has to occur at a later time. And since the destruction of Satan and the Great Judgment were both to be presided over by the Son of Man, and that those 2 things had to happen more or less at the same time, then clearly Yeshua's presence in the Holy Land in the 1<sup>st</sup> century represented some, but not all, of what the Son of Man would do.

Therefore it is as with the Parable of the farmer who plants a seed and comes back later to find that not only the good seed he planted has sprung up but so have pesky weeds. Yet, he instructed that the weeds were not to be pulled up by his workers just yet because it might harm the good plants in the doing. Therefore, the farmer would wait until harvest time. Both the good plants and the weeds would be harvested together. Afterward the weeds would be separated away and burned up to destruction, while the good plants of the harvest would go into his barns.

Thus what Jesus has introduced is an End Times scenario of some of the expected things happening now (in His time), but more of the expected things happening later. It is not an issue of one or the other. Yet even with His teaching on the End Times that explains an eschatology that requires beginning a redeeming process at one time, and then later returning to further that redemptive process, few of His followers seemed to grasp it. This is the reason that read in the New Testament of an urgency among Yeshua's 12 disciples, and of Paul and other Apostles, to hurry and at all costs spread the news of forgiveness of sins in Christ in order to become part of the Kingdom of Heaven... because they felt that time was short. They still believed that the Messiah's arrival meant that the End Times had to be coupled to it and therefore they were in the End Times. Why did they insist on holding to that view? Because the concept that when the Messiah (in the Son of Man role) arrived the Jews' liberation from Rome, the Great Judgment, and the destruction of the Devil all came along with it. And because Yeshua's followers accepted that only trust in Yeshua could save a person at the Great Judgment, then they were willing to pay any personal price to get that message out.

One of the more controversial things that we learned several chapters ago in

Matthew was that (as strange as it seems) John the Baptist couldn't accept that Yeshua was the End Times Son of Man. He was terribly confused by Christ's teachings about the Son of Man and the End Times. This is why the imprisoned John sent messengers to Christ asking: "Are you the one who has to come... or should we expect another?" Why couldn't John accept Yeshua as the Messiah and Son of Man even after baptizing Him and witnessing the Holy Spirit descend upon Him? It was because Jesus defined an End Times timetable that was different from John's understanding and the one generally believed among the Jewish public.

And so we find ourselves circling back to the issue I spoke about earlier in the lesson: in attempting to deal with something as cosmic in scope as Redemption History, even when we take but a portion of it to examine, we have to figure out a framework to discuss it in terms of events that have happened, will happen, in what order, and at what time. We also have little choice but to break it down into smaller pieces that we can give a name to each piece for no other reason than to be able to communicate the thought in some type of orderly fashion. Unfortunately, sometimes we can get so caught up in names of the different pieces and portions that we think they are God-ordained pieces and portions and names for them, when in fact they are not. And, so, we're going to have to do it yet again because it better enables me to explain the differences between how John the Baptist thought things were supposed to go, compared with how Jesus said they were going to go.

Here's what John the Baptist thought:

- 1) They were living in the present age of wickedness that had been ongoing for some indefinite period time... perhaps since before Abraham.
- 2) Upon the appearance of the Son of Man (who is also Israel's Messiah) would simultaneously come the Great Judgment with this Son of Man doing the judging.
- 3) After that the End of the World happens a re-creation of it occurs.

Here's what Yeshua taught:

- 1) There was an unnamed age (probably since Moses) of the righteous living alongside the wicked that had been the norm.

2) Upon John the Baptist's announcement, the Son of Man appeared (who is also Israel's Messiah), and the Messiah brought with Him the Kingdom of Heaven that included the possibility of forgiveness of sins by means of trust in Him, which in fact was a requirement to become a member of the Kingdom of Heaven.

3) Later in the future, the Son of Man will also come, resurrection of the dead will happen, the Son of Man will operate in the role of the judge at the Great Judgment, and a fully developed Kingdom of Heaven will come about with Him as its king.

4) After all this there will be, at some point, a destruction of the present world and a re-creation of the Universe and the Earth.

So when we see these two very different sets of End Times expectations side by side then we can understand why John could not bring himself to accept his cousin as the Son of Man. And this is why Yeshua would respond to John's jailhouse inquiry to Him by responding:

<sup>CJB</sup> **Matt. 11:4-6** *"Go and tell Yochanan what you are hearing and seeing- <sup>5</sup> the blind are seeing again, the lame are walking, people with tzara'at are being cleansed, the deaf are hearing, the dead are being raised, the Good News is being told to the poor- <sup>6</sup> and how blessed is anyone not offended by me!"*

What neither John nor the Jewish people in general could accept was the idea of 2 appearances of the Son of Man, separated by a long interim period of what I'll call the Messianic age (again, my words not God's). That is, it is an age when Messiah's promises and influences are in operation, and the Kingdom of Heaven is here, but it is in a slow development process.

So one has to carefully place John's thoughts on the order of events of the Latter Days and the End Times versus Christ's and to be careful not to accidentally mix them together to create some fictitious hybrid of the two. In my opinion this mixing is what has caused some of the strange Christian eschatological doctrines to appear.

Part of what can confuse modern Believers is that 2 terms... the Latter Days and the End Times... at times become conflated. Sometimes they are spoken and taught about as though they are but 2 terms meaning the same thing. It seems

that is essentially how the biblical Hebrews took those 2 terms to mean, in both Old and New Testament times. But what Christ taught us, and what history is in the process of proving, is that in the course of Redemption History (all of it, from Creation to the re-creation of a new heavens and earth), there are 2 Latter Days, but only 1 End Times... and though related they are different things that happen at different times. And those terms more represent eras of time rather than specific events.

I define these 2 eras in the following way: the 1<sup>st</sup> Latter Days were the decades leading up to, during, and immediately following the coming of Christ and then His crucifixion. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Latter Days are the decades leading up to and during the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ (that is yet to happen). On the other hand, the End of Days (or the End Times) is associated ONLY with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Latter Days and its immediate outcome. The End of Days includes resurrection, the cataclysmic conditions that result from the return of Messiah, the War of Armageddon and the battle with the forces of the Anti-Christ, and then climactic moments that usher us into the Millennial Kingdom when the Kingdom of Heaven has matured to its fullest state. Clearly this has yet to happen, so the End Times did NOT happen in Christ's era and can only be something future to us. The End of Days will also include the pouring out of God's wrath upon the earth and the Great Judgment as judged by the Son of Man (Jesus). This, of course, has also not happened.

While there's so much more I'd like to tell you, I think it's time to draw this part of today's lesson to a close and I'll re-visit it at a later time.

My purpose for today's exercise was to try to bring some of the weightier puzzle pieces of the Gospel of Matthew together to better understand the impact of Yeshua on Redemption History as a preparation for chapters 24 - 28. I also presented you today with a flow-chart of Redemption History that takes us from the Beginning (Creation) to the New Beginning (Re-Creation). I gave you 7 (or 8) stages of Redemption History as a framework for how to think about its many milestones along the way. I also explained how what Jesus taught about the Latter Days and the End Times, and the sequence of events that involved the Son of Man, differed in important ways from what John the Baptist and the Jewish people in general believed, and thus why while John ushered in the Kingdom of Heaven, sadly he would not be part of it.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Matt. 11:11 <sup>11</sup> Yes! I tell you that among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than Yochanan the Immerser! Yet the one who is**

### ***least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he!***

So in the stages of Redemption History as I defined and named them, where in that mix are we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Without doubt we're somewhere in the 6<sup>th</sup> stage. We're in the stage when the Kingdom of Heaven has been planted here on earth and is still developing. We are still in the same stage that was inaugurated by John the Baptist. That was 2000 years ago, wasn't it? So we've been living in this same stage of Redemption History for 20 centuries, which means that it must be very ripe, waiting to flow into the next stage, which is the return of the Son of Man as the Great Judge and King of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Next time we'll jump right into the inspired words of Matthew chapter 24 and the several revelations from Yeshua that come with it.