

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 84, Chapter 24 Continued 5

Matthew 24:30 says: ***Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, all the tribes of the Land will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with tremendous power and glory.*** Last week we carefully dissected this passage to understand what some of the terms meant. For instance, what are "the tribes of the Land", which is more often translated "the tribes of the earth"? We learned that there is much academic disagreement over the proper interpretation because "tribes of the Land" indicates the 12 tribes of Israel while "tribes of the earth" is a rather unusual way of saying everyone on our planet. This was not meant as an either/or situation, but rather as both, because this is more the way biblical prophecy actually plays out in reality. Prophecies more often than not carry a double meaning because they portend a double fulfillment; one fulfillment that is usually relatively soon, and another that is well into the future. Another feature of the double fulfillment nature of biblical prophecy is that often the affected group is expanded in scope as well as the geographical area becoming more extensive. Thus, in the example I cited two things that will happen as regards our passage, verse 30: the 12 tribes of Israel will be gathered back to the Holy Land of Israel from their worldwide exiles (on a physical level) as the final culmination of a long process of ingathering; and yet on another level so will those who have been grafted-in to Israel (Believers in Yeshua of all ethnicities) will be gathered spiritually into the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is also necessary that we back away from this passage far enough to see it as a historic panorama: Yeshua has just described the event that all Christendom and all the cosmos yearns for: His own return in power and glory. This also marks the end of the age (or at least the first moments of the climax of history as

we've known it). I put it that way because I have little doubt that these final acts of the Redemption process will all occur over a very short span of a literal 15 - 22 days, which is the calendar span of the final 3 biblical feasts. Just as the Redemptive acts of Yeshua's death, burial, and resurrection, and then the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell Believers all happened within a span of about 50 days (depending on how one chooses to count it) so will the final acts of Redemption happen very rapidly and coincide precisely with the Fall feasts. This is why our preparation for this event is so critical. Just as when we learn that a hurricane is on the way there are a precious few hours or days to prepare for its effects, once it arrives it's too late. It will be that same way the moment that the sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky; the time to prepare ourselves spiritually, to have already sincerely repented and accepted Christ into our minds and hearts for who He is, will have ended. This is why in our passage that the people of the earth are described as mourning, because those who don't know Yeshua will instinctively know that their doom for all eternity has come upon them. Added to those who mourn will likely be Believers because we will know and love so many that have resisted accepting Messiah... from our own spouses, to our children and grandchildren, perhaps parents and our dearest friends... who are as of that moment lost forever.

Now; did Jesus's disciples understand His words as a prophecy of His return as the Son of Man, coming back to Jerusalem from His heavenly home? Nothing I read tells me that they did. And it is from this perspective of His disciples not understanding their Master's meaning... or perhaps not entirely comprehending it in the fully literal sense that He meant it... that we must understand what remains for us in the final chapters of Matthew, and as it also appears in Mark and Luke.

Let's re-read a portion of Matthew 24.

RE-READ MATTHEW 24:32 - 42

The remainder of the 24th chapter of Matthew is a series of illustrations Yeshua uses to get across a few points concerning the several things that will lead-up to His return as the Son of Man including the event itself. He has yet to discuss what happens immediately following His return. All of these illustrations stress awareness and preparedness. This is a type of preparedness that must begin with trust in Yeshua as the Redeeming Son of Man, but also must include believing Him when He speaks about things that surely sounded incomprehensible to His disciples, and remains frightfully so within many of our

Churches and Synagogues today. If what He was saying was easily understood, palatable and acceptable as a true vision of the future, He certainly wouldn't have been so repetitive and passionate in urging His disciples to listen and obey. Thus, Yeshua wants us to be acutely aware and on-guard so that we aren't caught by surprise or fooled by people or events.

The first illustration Jesus presents is that of the fig tree. It involves what is but common sense if not common knowledge for 1st century Holy Land Jews. One doesn't have to be a farmer to know that before a tree produces its fruit, first the branches sprout and new leaves form, and then only afterwards does those little nodules of fruit begin to appear. Is there intended symbolism in the use of a fig tree as opposed to a different kind of fruit tree? Many good Bible scholars and teachers think there is. Most often if they do detect symbolism in this story, it is that the fig tree represents Israel; and this comes from the record of chapter 21 when Jesus cursed a fig tree that didn't have fruit on it, and it instantly withered and died. The usual understanding is that if the fig tree symbolically represented Israel in chapter 21, so here in chapter 24 it must represent the same. Two thoughts on this: first, as I showed you when we studied chapter 21, the fig tree did NOT symbolize Israel as a whole but rather only Jerusalem as the capital of its religious leadership, hierarchy and ritual. Biblically the Olive tree represents Israel as a whole. Second, I'm not sure that the fig tree is much more than a commonly known fruit tree that made for easy illustration at the moment. Although Yeshua and His disciples were on the hill called the Mount of Olives, there were nearly as many fig trees there as there were olives. And, since Jesus was in Jerusalem for Passover (a springtime festival) the figs were in their natural process of pushing out new leaves and the earliest sign of fruit buds would have been appearing. In other words, the fig tree was a handy object. I'm skeptical that the fig tree as used in this illustration is symbolic of anything at all.

Christ quickly gets to the bottom line: when you see the branches of a fig tree begin to grow tender, and then next the leaves start to sprout, and then finally the small buds of fruit start to appear (in that order), then clearly because of the well-known seasonal cycle of figs (as they grow in the Holy Land) all know that summer is soon to arrive. And, if I'm not taking this illustration too far, we also must notice and be assured that this process can't be interrupted by any kind of power, spiritual or human, once started. The annual seasons happen in a specific order, and the agricultural cycles along with them, regardless of what humans want or do. Certainly, there are periods of earth history when there are disruptions to the earth cycles; super hot summers, or too cold of springs, or too

little winter rains, which in turn hampers plants in doing what they normally do. We've had ice ages, and we've had very warm periods over the eons. Regardless: spring ALWAYS follows winter, and summer ALWAYS follows spring even in the cold polar regions of earth. And while I doubt the disciples were thinking in that kind of depth about what Yeshua was saying, sometimes we of the 21st century who can become preoccupied about the End Times need to put these concerns on pause long enough to grasp that just as the seasonal cycles are fixed due to divine order and not accident, so are the Redemptive and End Times milestones fixed according to divine order. Nothing will interrupt them, and they will happen in the same fixed order as prophesied, just as do the seasons and the agricultural cycle of the fig tree. So, these several Redemptive History milestones Jesus has so far revealed to His disciples that are the legitimate indicators of the lead-up to the End Times, including the notice that lots of things like wars near and far-off, and earthquakes, famines and other calamities around the globe are NOT to be taken as those indicators (and so His followers shouldn't mistakenly think they are), are illustrated by His use of the fig tree.

Let's not miss an important lesson from verse 33 for us in our time. The words "WHEN you see these things happen..." means that we will not know where we are in Redemption History UNTIL we see these things occur. Speculation is useless; only after the fact will we recognize these things for the signs that they are. This is a lesson that I try to regularly hammer home (hoping to reduce some anxieties): the only way we can truly know when prophecy is being fulfilled is to see it in hindsight. And that is because of our human nature that can not see even 1 second ahead of us. All we have to go on is the immediate present and everything that is the past. There are so many intricate puzzle pieces to Redemption History that a sufficient number have to be properly assembled, in order, before we can be certain of what we're seeing. Therefore, we are not to jump to conclusions or to set End Times prophetic Church doctrines in stone. We simply do not have sufficient information to draw anything like a clear picture.

One thing we do know with certainty is that for the End Times prophetic fulfillments to truly be entered into, Israel must exist as a physical nation of Hebrews. Just as for the Anti-Christ to desecrate the Temple, the Temple must exist in a Jewish controlled Jerusalem. Of these two must-happen events, Israel DID come back into existence in 1948. But, thanks to centuries of incorrect doctrines being taught, it mostly went without notice (except by several million furious Arabs and Muslims). Even now, the significance of it (while starting to be recognized by an increasing part of the Church) is still often played down or

misinterpreted. This is exactly the sort of thing that is going to happen as the signal events of the entrance into the End Times begin. Some who are aware, and have the proper information, and are patient for enough of it to play out so that it can be unmistakably recognized for what it is, will be rewarded with deliverance. Others... including those who regularly attend Church and Synagogue (and of course those of the world population that worship other gods or no god at all)... will be oblivious. They will be looking for the wrong things, or not looking at all, and left out. Let's not be surprised should we be among those Believers who do recognize what is happening, but will likely be severely criticized if not outright persecuted for our efforts.

Verse 34 entices us with yet another challenging passage. Yeshua says that **"this people will not certainly not pass away before all these things happen"**. Nearly all other than this CJB translation say **"this generation will not certainly not pass away..."** Interpreting the Greek **genea** as "people" instead of "generation" is a legitimate option, although that is not how the term is usually used. However, I think both ways are correct because it is typical of prophecy whereby the fulfillment first happens soon in a limited way to a limited number of people in a limited geographical setting, and then later in the future happens again in a much more expansive way, to a larger segment of people in a more global geographical setting. Now; if you or I were sitting there on the Mount of Olives intently listening to Yeshua's words, what might we make of what He's telling us? We'd expect that sometime pretty soon (weeks, maybe months) all kinds of terrible things were going to happen (even worse than Rome's occupation of the Holy Land), and include terrifying cosmic events like the sun and moon growing dark and the lights in the heavens falling. We would think that, and they did. But, as it turns out Yeshua was talking about events happening on two horizons: one near, and one far.

Then in verse 35 Yeshua resurrects some language that He used in the Sermon on the Mount. He says that indeed Heaven and Earth will pass away, but his words (that is, His teachings) will not. For those who might be new to Seed of Abraham Torah Class, I'll take a moment to recite to you something that those who've been with us for awhile have heard numerous times.

^{CJB} **Matthew 5:17-19** ¹⁷ **"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.** ¹⁸ **Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has**

happened. ¹⁹ So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Of the several unmistakable, definitive statements that Christ made at His Sermon on the Mount, the part that says "I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah...", the words of our focus are "heaven and earth pass away". Some Bible teachers say this is just a Jewish expression meaning something very much like the more modern English expression "until Hell freezes over". That is not true; there is no known Jewish expression of "heaven and earth passing away". Yeshua is talking about an actual event that is prophesied in the Old Testament and recalled in Revelation chapter 21.

^{CJB} ***Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer there.***

Again: heaven (meaning "the heavens", the Universe) and earth passing away is an **event** that actually happens, and that is exactly how Christ meant it in Matthew chapter 5. He uses it the same way here in chapter 24. His teachings will remain in effect, alongside those of the Torah, until the foretold event of Revelation 21 occurs. Let me be clear: Jesus's words did NOT replace the Torah or the Law of Moses. His words from Matthew 5 and from Matthew 24 in no way oppose one another; they are the two sides of the same coin.

Then in verse 36 we get some additional information that makes me uncertain about just how to use Daniel's End Times timeline. Yeshua says that when that day and hour come (for these several things to happen and then His return) no one knows. Notice that this lack of knowledge extends not only to the angels in Heaven, but to Himself. The Father alone holds such knowledge. The theological and practical implications about this passage are considerable and hotly debated. Let's address these one at a time.

First, this issue of the words "when that day and hour come". This is meant to work alongside of the timing Yeshua put forward using the fig tree illustration. Jesus utilizes the fig tree to make the most basic point that doesn't involve any precision of time or date; only an order in which these things will happen. That is,

in the springtime the fig tree branches grow tender, next new leaves pop out, and then after that the fruit buds show themselves. Therefore, obviously the summer is near (because summer always follows spring, and it is always in the spring when the fig tree does these things). But in verse 36 Yeshua's teaching now goes from saying that while we can know in the broadest terms the approximation of what it will look like when the End Times is approaching, we'll not ever know in advance any details of the events or about the day or hour; a date and time. That is, no one can say something like: On September 22nd, in 2025, around evening, Christ will return.

That said, it seems like from what Yeshua has said that as things get very close to His return, and as more of the prophetic puzzle pieces fall into place (such as the construction of a new Temple and then later the Anti-Christ desecrating it), perhaps we'll better figure out just how to insert and utilize Daniel's prophecy that deals with the timing of it all. Listen to this excerpt from Daniel chapter 12 that is more a caution than it is information.

CJB Daniel 12:8-13 ⁸ I heard this, but I couldn't understand what it meant; so I asked, "Lord, what will be the outcome of all this?" ⁹ But he said, "Go your way, Dani'el; for these words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰ Many will purify, cleanse and refine themselves; but the wicked will keep on acting wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand. But those with discernment will understand. ¹¹ From the time the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. ¹² How blessed will be anyone who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. ¹³ But you, go your way until the end comes. Then you will rest and rise for your reward, at the end of days."

Daniel says " I heard this, but I couldn't understand what it meant..." God responds that knowledge of these things is going to be kept sealed away until the End. Even today we're still not in much better position to understand the finer points of the prophetic timing because what is being revealed remains future to us. So yes on the one hand we will be able to recognize the season we have entered, but on the other, not much more detail beyond that (although that's not going to stop some of you from trying). To be blunt, using very much mental effort and time to figure out exactly where we are in the Redemptive timeline, or to believe any of us can work out a pretty good handle on when Yeshua returns, is only going to distract from the important work that God has for His followers right

now. It can, as it has for many Christians, destroy our peace and make a few downright anxious and fearful. Better to take God's words to Daniel and act upon them: "But you, go your way until the end comes. Then you will rest and rise for your reward at the end of days". Worry about the things you can control, and the things you can know, and leave the rest in God's capable hands.

Now for the highly controversial part of verse 36. It is quite interesting that until the Church Doctrine of the Trinity as is it is defined among many Church branches was created, this verse really didn't present much of a problem. We only first hear of the concept of a Trinity Doctrine about the same time the idea of creating a New Testament was being discussed among gentile Christian leaders... around 200 A.D. It remained quite contentious until nearly the end of the 4th century when it was written into Roman Church law at the Council of Nicea. Up to then, the mystery of the exact relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit was recognized, but it was not until Nicea that the Church decided on a specific doctrine of that relationship that all were to adhere to.

When I say the Trinity as defined by many Church branches it is because it surprises many Christians to learn that there isn't just one, universally recognized Trinity Doctrine as the early Roman Church hoped to chisel into stone. The devil, as they say, is in the details. And some of the details date back to a time when there was a raging debate within Roman Christianity, over and against other Christianities, regarding the substance of God. So rather than our spending literally numerous lessons dealing with the several Trinity Doctrines and the various debates over the substance of God, I'll only address the one that seems to be the most familiar (and probably most prevalent) in the Western Church world: the one that says Father, Son and Holy Spirit are co-equal. That is, there is no hierarchy of authority, and that the unity is so complete among the 3 persons of the Trinity that capabilities, knowledge and wisdom among them are fully equal. It is the fundamentals of this particular version of the Trinity Doctrine that has allowed the notion to flourish in some Church branches that the Father was the Old Testament God who more or less retreated into retirement in order to allow the New Testament God, Jesus the Son, to take over and replace Him. Please notice that I'm talking in broad generalities because the variations among and even within denominations are many and sometimes highly nuanced.

I'll condense the matter down by saying this: the particular Doctrine of the Trinity that makes God 3 persons, without hierarchy, and of equal status and knowledge, defies the plain reading of Scripture... including the New Testament.

I've asked some folks who believe in that particular version of the Trinity Doctrine how to square that doctrine with the words of Jesus that He doesn't know when He's coming back, only the Father knows. The answer is usually that Jesus chooses not to know. He could know if He wanted to know; but for whatever reason makes it so that only His Father knows. I must say that such an explanation leaves me flat. It is, in my opinion, a rather tortured way to uphold a non-biblical belief that the 3 persons are precisely co-equal even though Christ regularly prays to the Father (is He therefore also praying to Himself?), asks for the Father's will to be done (is He therefore asking for His own will to be done?), and in the Lord's Prayer tells people to pray to "Our Father in Heaven". NEVER does Christ tell us to pray to Him. When in Heaven, the Son of Man appears before the Ancient of Days (a well known and undisputed title for the Father), and the Father tells the Son of Man that He'll get up now, vacate His throne, retire and turn everything over to Jesus, right? No! He tells the Son of Man to take a seat at His right hand... which is where kings always put their chief advisor or second in command.

Therefore, these biblical facts prevent me from accepting the version of the Trinity Doctrine that claims equality of the 3 persons, or that they all have equal claim to the same knowledge and wisdom. Where those lines of demarcation between them precisely fall I do not know (although we get a few general examples of it in Scripture). At the least, in all instances, the Father is supreme. It is He who sends His Son and His Holy Spirit to do whatever His will is; never the other way around. I don't want to belabor this further except to say that the problem is one that is rooted in trying to satisfy our human desire to want to comprehend the mystery of God as ***echad***, one, when we are at the same time presented with the conundrum of declaring that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all divine parts of the same God. No earthly representation or example of this relationship exists nor will it ever, so it will remain a mystery to our human minds until we no longer exist in this physical world and instead ascend into the purely spiritual.

Perhaps it is but my simplistic way of going about matters; but I think it may be best to defer trying to explain, or rationalize, or understand God's substance or exactly how the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit operate as a unity until we arrive in Heaven. Rather, in faith, we are to accept it as much as we're biblically informed about it. We can accept that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are perfectly united and all are divine without accepting that all have identical capabilities, knowledge and wisdom. There is an obvious and biblically stated

hierarchy among them that is not ambiguous. Some may be more comfortable accepting mystery as mystery than others I suppose. I think the better path is to pursue that which is knowable versus that which is not. Therefore, we are not obligated to uphold or defend manmade doctrines from ages ago that didn't make sense then and still are lacking. In our passages Christ makes it crystal clear that He is not privileged to know the exact timing of the End Times or when He's returning; the One who will send Him back does know, but is not sharing this knowledge.

In verse 37 Yeshua illustrates not the time or order, but rather the circumstances of His return. He draws an analogy to Noah and the Great Flood. Yeshua explains it in terms of people going about their normal lives... nothing wicked is mentioned. People were eating and drinking (not drinking in the sense of getting drunk, but just normal enjoyment), men were taking wives and women were becoming wives, and this went on right up until the day that Noah and his family entered the Ark. Then, because the people didn't see the sign of the times, the flood waters came and swept them to their deaths. Yeshua says that the prelude to, and then the culmination of His arrival, will be like that.

Let's not make more out of this than this simple illustration of probably the best-known Bible story that every Jew knew; perhaps the very first story they were ever taught as a small child. The mental picture is this: Noah took a very long time to build a huge ship... years no doubt. It's not imaginable that people didn't notice and ask him what this strange monstrosity was and why he was building it. All but Noah's family ignored what God said was going to happen. However, there is no indication that Noah had any idea of the day and the hour that the flood would come; he only knew that it would. So, with global doom impending, and the world oblivious to it, everyone went right on living their usual lives. Every detail of the Flood story doesn't apply to when Yeshua comes. For instance, we aren't aware of any specific signs given to the people of the world when Noah was building his Ark, other than he was building it. We're not told that the people were warned to prepare; only that they were wicked. All we have is speculation about what people thought about this Ark project. Nonetheless the point is that Noah and his family believed God and prepared for the flood. No one else did. When the defining moment came, it came suddenly; with that first splash of rain on the ground, the fate of all creatures on earth was sealed. It will be this type of circumstance and disinterest among people having no sense that something catastrophic, deadly, and final is about to happen. The difference is that it seems that in Noah's day the earth's people weren't warned about the coming event, or

given signs. But in the future when the Son of Man returns, centuries of notice has been given, signs and milestones have been erected, and what to do to prepare has been well outlined. And yet, relatively few will pay any attention and so will be caught unaware. There will be no second chances.

Verses 40 - 42 describe the suddenness of it all; the lack of awareness of the earth's population as the Son of Man's returns. The moral of the story is that one must be prepared for this to happen at any moment, in the blink of an eye, when we least expect it.

While these 3 illustrations are speaking of mostly the same thing, the emphasis in the 3rd one is slightly different. These verses along with some words of Paul form the foundation of the doctrine of what Christians call The Rapture.

^{CJB} **1Thessalonians 4:16-17** ¹⁶ *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a rousing cry, with a call from one of the ruling angels, and with God's shofar; those who died united with the Messiah will be the first to rise;* ¹⁷ *then we who are left still alive will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we will always be with the Lord.*

When combined with what Paul just said, the idea that two men will be laboring in the field and one is taken and the other left behind, and that two women will be grinding flour at home and one is taken and the other left behind, it probably needs to be understood in light of Noah and the Flood. That is Noah and his family were taken, and the doomed left behind. Interestingly there are those Bible scholars who see it in reverse; they see the "taken" as the doomed and the "left behind" as the fortunate ones. Thus, the "taken" ones were swept away by judgment and the "left behind" ones were the righteous. I can't see the logic in this. No matter how one stacks this up, those left behind are going to suffer from all the calamities that occur when God pours out His wrath, and those taken won't.

It is a foundational biblical principle that God does not pour out His wrath upon the righteous and the wicked together. God divides, elects, and separates exactly for the purpose of meting out wrath on the one, and favoring mercy upon the other. Noah may be the prime and earliest example of this. Therefore, as the End approaches and God begins pouring out His wrath globally, early in the process He will protect the millions of righteous on earth in what is really the best and

most logical way: He will remove us from the scene. While the timing of this removal is a worthy discussion, that's for another day. Right now, I'd like to address what this removal... this Rapture... is.

Today I think I can say without opposition that the mental image most Christians have is of Christians either suddenly vanishing en masse, or flying up into the air just as suddenly. The flying up into the air is quite a new take on the meaning, and I think is most unwarranted. Vanishing may be closer to it, but that vanishing isn't really stated. And frankly, if what this meant was for all Believers to suddenly disappear, that wouldn't be very hard to say in the language of any era.

Assuming some kind of instantaneous vanishing is what happens, is this speaking of body or soul or both? Could this be a sudden worldwide death of all Believers, without warning, without fear and without pain, which releases our souls to Heaven? While there is really nothing more I can add to what this sudden event will look like, because there really is no more in the Bible to add to it, the thing we can know is that this event will be unexpected and will occur without immediate warning. Like the people of Noah's day, the concept of the two in the field and the two at home amounts to folks (righteous and wicked) going about their daily affairs as though it was any other day. For the disciples, the scene Yeshua draws is a familiar one that they view every day; so, there is nothing very future about it. It's we of the far future from the 1st century that need to try to extrapolate what this means for us.

Yeshua issues the bottom line in verse 42: "So stay alert, because you don't know on what day the Lord will come". And, as He confessed earlier, neither does He know. Thus, the connecting fiber behind these 3 examples is: awareness, alertness, and preparedness.

We'll continue next week with Matthew 24.