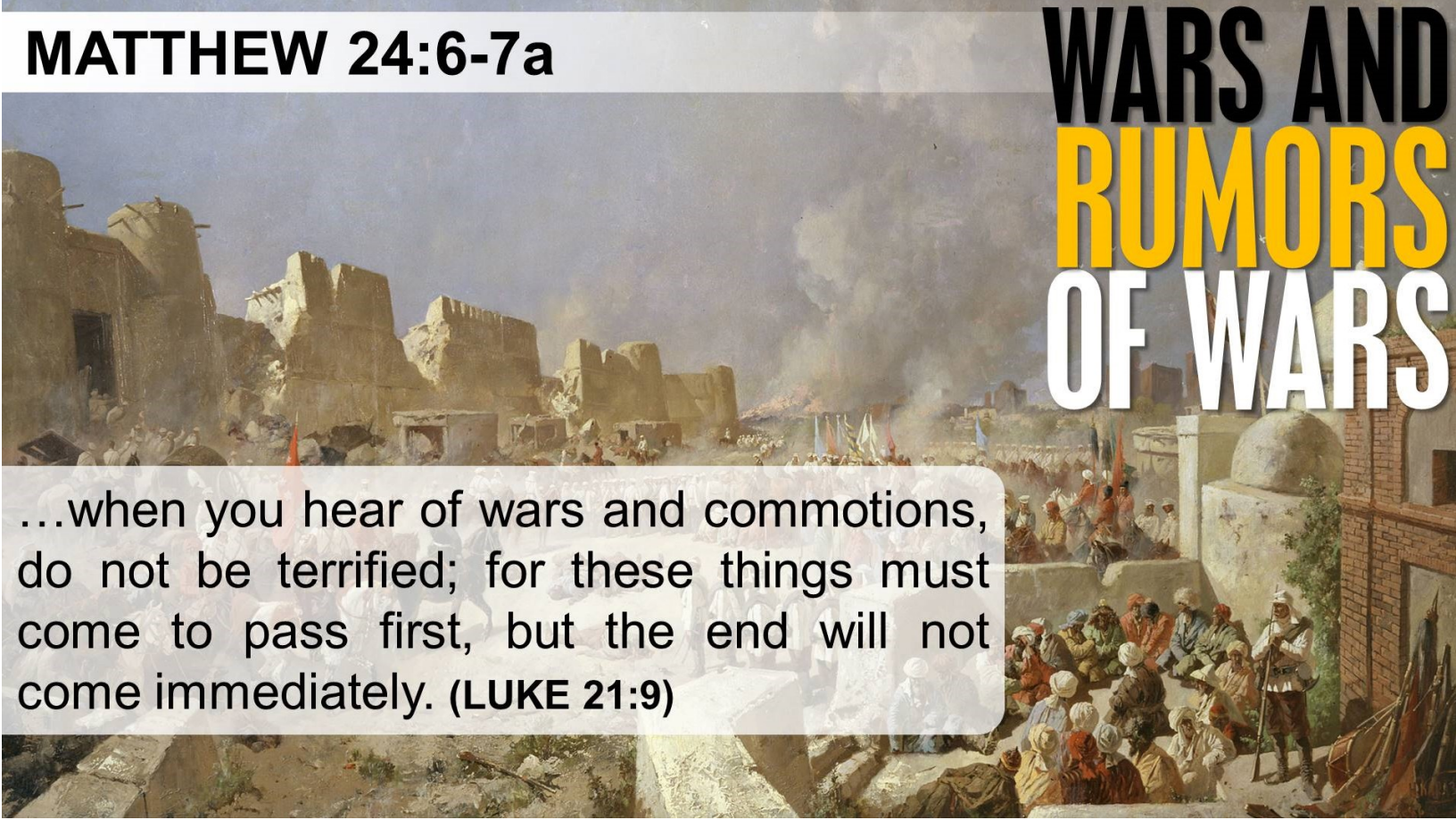


AN ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW 24

- ⇒ Matthew 24 is referenced extensively in discussions about the end times. However, it is important that we know what end time is being discussed in what part of the text, for the whole is not about the second coming of Christ and the time of judgment.
- ⇒ In our series, we want to take a detailed look at Matthew 24, set into both its Scriptural and historical context. We want to see exactly what the disciples were asking Jesus about, and understand the information which He gave.
- ⇒ For the early Christians, especially those living in Jerusalem, understanding this text was a life & death issue. For us, it is faithful building to see fulfillment of what has already been accomplished, and to ready ourselves for what is to come.

WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS



...when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately. (LUKE 21:9)

- ⇒ Jesus makes it clear—this is not a sign of the end, but as we termed it in our previous lesson, a premature sign of the things that were coming. Essentially the idea is, “It must happen, but don’t get too excited.”
- ⇒ There has been a steady stream of wars throughout man’s history. However, in the first century Roman empire, there were an excessive number, and many of them involving the Jews in one way or another.

MATTHEW 24:6-7a

WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS

...Vitellius prepared to make war with Aretas, having with him two legions of armed men... but when on the fourth day letters came to him, which informed him of the death of Tiberius, he obliged the multitude to take an oath of fidelity to Caius; he also recalled his army, and made them every one go home...

(JOSEPHUS, ANTIQUITIES 18:5:3)



- ⇒ Here is an example of a rumored war—it was planned but did not come to fruition.
- ⇒ Josephus records many wars or commotions of the Jews:
“...a great sedition arose between the Jews that inhabited Caesarea, and the Syrians who dwelt there also... they came to throwing stones at one another; and several were wounded, and fell on both sides, though still the Jews were the conquerors. But when Felix saw that the quarrel was become a kind of war, he came upon them on the sudden, and desired the Jews to desist; and when they refused so to do, he armed his soldiers, and sent them out upon them, and slew many of them...” (Josephus, Antiquities, 20:8:7)

MATTHEW 24:6-7a

The Jews were all zealously disposed to go to war with the Romans... (JOSEPHUS, WARS 2:17:2)

...at this time it was that some of those that principally excited the people to go to war, made an assault upon a certain fortress called Masada. They took it by treachery and slew the Romans that were there, and put others of their own party to keep it. (JOSEPHUS, WARS 2:17:2)

WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS



- ⇒ Desiring independence, the Jews warred with the Romans on a number of occasions.
- ⇒ Though taking the fortress called Masada may have been counted a victory, Josephus goes on to tell us the following:
“...the people of Caesarea had slain the Jews that were among them on the very same day and hour [when the soldiers were slain], which one would think must have come to pass by the direction of Providence; insomuch that in one hour’s time about twenty thousand Jews were killed, and all Caesarea was emptied of its Jewish inhabitants.”
(Josephus, Wars, 2:18:1)

MATTHEW 24:6-7a

...the other cities arose up against the Jews that were among them; those of Askelon slew two thousand five hundred, and those of Ptolemais two hundred, and put not a few into bonds; those of Tyre also put a great number to death, but kept a great number in prison... (JOSEPHUS, WARS 2:18:5)

WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS

The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disaster, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword, there were three civil wars, more foreign wars, and often both at the same time. (TACITUS, HISTORIES, 1:2)

- ⇒ Again, Josephus speaks of the battles the Jews involved themselves in. These wars were not confined to Jerusalem, nor to Judea, but were throughout the empire.
- ⇒ As Tacitus began his record of history, he identified it as a time of wars throughout the Roman world. Both he and Josephus confirm the words that Jesus said about the years before Jerusalem would be destroyed.

MATTHEW 24:7b

...in those days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

(ACTS 11:27-28)

FAMINES, PESTILENCES AND EARTHQUAKES

...others advised to let the banks alone, but to lie still before the city, to guard against the coming out of the Jews, and against their carrying provisions into the city, and so to leave the enemy to the famine, and this without direct fighting with them... (JOSEPHUS, WARS 5:12:1)

- ⇒ Famine, pestilence and earthquakes are common, but there would be an extraordinary amount before the destruction.
- ⇒ Some will point to a rise in earthquakes in recent years and say that Jesus was foretelling our day. It is unlikely there has been a rise in seismic activity, but rather we have improved technology to record with and communication to find out about such events in other areas of the world. Regardless, the context in which Jesus spoke was about Jerusalem and the temple's destruction which occurred in 70 AD.
- ⇒ The Bible speaks of a famine in Judea (1 & 2 Corinthians), and Josephus speaks of famine in the city's eventual fall.

MATTHEW 24:7b

FAMINES, PESTILENCES AND EARTHQUAKES

...the famine was too hard for all other passions, and it is destructive to nothing so much as to modesty; for what was otherwise worthy of reverence was in this case despised; insomuch that children pulled the very morsels that their fathers were eating out of their very mouths, and, what was still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do as to their infants, and when those that were most dear were perishing under their hands, they were not ashamed to take from them the very last drops that might preserve their lives... (JOSEPHUS, WARS 5:10:3)

⇒ More from Josephus about the absolute grip the famine had on the city of Jerusalem leading up to it's fall.

⇒ Another quote:

"Now of those that perished by famine in the city, the number was prodigious, and the miseries they underwent were unspeakable; for if so much as the shadow of any kind of food did anywhere appear, a war was commenced presently, and the dearest friends fell a fighting one with another about it, snatching from each other the most miserable supports of life." (Josephus, Wars 6:3:4)

MATTHEW 24:7b

FAMINES, PESTILENCES AND EARTHQUAKES

Now when they were slaying him, he made this imprecation upon them, that they might undergo both famine and pestilence in this war, and besides all that, they might come to the mutual slaughter of one another; all which imprecations God confirmed against these impious men... (JOSEPHUS, WARS 4:6:1)

⇒ Josephus made this statement about Nigem of Peres, who had been a man of valor in war against the Romans, but was thereafter put to death by his own people. He foretold the famine and pestilence of Jerusalem.

⇒ Now, hear Josephus about the earthquakes:

"...a storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continual lightnings, terrible thunders, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men when the system of the world was put into this discord, and anyone would guess that these wonders foreshowed some grand calamities that were coming." (Josephus, Wars, 4:4:5)

MATTHEW 24:7b

Several prodigies occurred in that year. Birds of evil omen perched on the Capitol; houses were thrown down by frequent shocks of earthquake, and as the panic spread, all the weak were trodden down in the hurry and confusion of the crowd. (TACITUS, THE ANNALS, 12:43)

FAMINES, PESTILENCES AND EARTHQUAKES

How often have the cities of Asia and Achaea fallen with one shock! How many cities have been swallowed up in Syria! How many in Macedonia! How often has Paphos become a ruin! News has often been brought to us of the demolition of whole cities at once! (SENECA)

- ⇒ “...in the Capitol...” - Rome. But then throughout the empire as well—Asia, Achaea, Syria, Macedonia, Paphos.
- ⇒ Tacitus would also write:

“One of the famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was that same year overthrown by an earthquake ... an earthquake too demolished a large part of Pompeii, a populous town in Campania.”

(Tacitus, The Annals, 14:27; 15:22)
- ⇒ Other earthquakes were recorded by various authors and historians (Seneca, Philostratus, Eusebius, Orosius, Sentonius, etc.) to occur between 45-69 AD with much frequency in Hierapolis, Colosse, Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Judea, Rome and other places.

LUKE 21:11

Now those that kept watch in the temple came hereupon running to the captain of the temple, and told him of it, who then came up thither, and not without great difficulty was able to shut the gate again. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open them the gate of happiness. But the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies... (JOSEPHUS, WARS, 18:5:3)

- ❖ Sword shaped star
- ❖ Year long comet
- ❖ Light at altar at night
- ❖ Lamb born in temple
- ❖ Gates opening at night

FEARFUL SIGHTS & GREAT SIGNS

⇒ Luke adds “fearful sights and great signs from heaven” to this same portion of text. The following precedes the text given above in The Wars of the Jews by Josephus:

“...while they did not attend nor give credit to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation, but, like men infatuated, without eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them. Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year. Thus also before the Jews’ rebellion, and before these commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth day of the month Nisan and at the ninth hour of

the night, so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day time, which lasted for half an hour. This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskilled, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes, as to portend those events that followed immediately upon it. At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple. Moreover the eastern gate of the inner court of the temple, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a brass arm with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night. (this quote is continued on the top of the previous page)

⇒ Next....

LUKE 21:11

...a few days after the feast, on the one and twentieth day of the month Jyar, a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared ... before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover, at the feast which was called Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner court of the temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, 'Let us remove hence.' But what is still more terrible, there was one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a

- ❖ Army in the sky
- ❖ Voices in the temple

FEARFUL SIGHTS & GREAT SIGNS

⇒ Quote continues...

"...plebeian and a husbandman, who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in great peace and prosperity, came to that feast where on it is our custom for everyone to make tabernacles to God in the temple, began on a sudden to cry aloud, 'A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, a voice against this whole people!' This was his cry as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city ... during all the time that passed before the war began, this man did not go near any of the citizens, nor was seen by them while he said so; but he every day

uttered these lamentable words, as if it were his premeditated vow, 'Woe, woe to Jerusalem!' ... he continued this ditty for seven years and five months, without growing hoarse, or being tired therewith, until the very time that he saw his presage in earnest fulfilled in our siege, when it ceased; for as he was going round upon the wall, he cried out with his utmost force, 'Woe, woe to the city again, and to this people, and to the holy house!' And just as he added at the last, 'Woe, woe to myself also,' there came a stone out of one of the engines, and smote him, and killed him immediately, and as he was uttering the very same presages he gave up the ghost." **(Josephus, Wars, 6:5:3)**

⇒ Next....

LUKE 21:11

There had been seen hosts joining battle in the skies, a fiery gleam of arms, the temple illuminated by a sudden radiance from the clouds. The doors of the inner shrine were suddenly thrown open, and a voice of more than mortal tone was heard to cry that the gods were departing. Some few put a fearful meaning on these things, but in most there was a firm persuasion, that in the ancient records of their priests was contained a prediction of how at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers, coming from Judaea, were to acquire universal empire. These mysterious prophecies had pointed to Vespasian and Titus, but the common people, with the usual blindness of ambition, had interpreted these might destinies themselves, and could not be brought even by disaster to believe the truth.

(TACITUS, THE HISTORIES, 5:13)

FEARFUL SIGHTS & GREAT SIGNS

- ⇒ Tacitus confirms the things spoken of by Josephus.
- ⇒ It may be that the prediction Tacitus refers to was actually the prophecies about the Messiah (from the East, Judea, not from the West, Rome). Tacitus, seeing the Romans take power and find victory over the Jews applied the prophecies to Vespasian and Titus. Jesus had already fulfilled these Messianic prophecies and was reigning in heaven.

LUKE 21:11

Our Rabbis taught: during the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple... the doors of the Hekal would open of themselves, until R. Johanan b. Zakkai rebuked them, saying, 'Hekal, Hekal, why wilt thou be the alarmer thyself? I know about thee that thou wilt be destroyed, for Zechariah ben Ido already prophesied concerning thee, Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars.' (THE SONCINO TALMUD, SEDER MO'ED, VOL III, TOMA, P. 186)

Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars.'
(ZECHARIAH 11:1)

FEARFUL SIGHTS & GREAT SIGNS

- ⇒ About 200 AD (130 years after the destruction), the Talmud recorded the above statement.
- ⇒ Zechariah was a post-captivity prophet (the Jews were back in the land when he spoke). He began to prophecy about 20-30 years after the return. And even at that time, he was already revealing the destruction to come.



**ALL THESE THINGS ARE
THE BEGINNING
OF SORROWS.**

⇒ These “premature signs” are the signs before the signs; there would be more things, and worse things as the time drew near. This was just the beginning of sorrows.

MATTHEW 24:9-10

“...Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him.” (ACTS 8:1)

“...about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also.” (ACTS 12:1-2)



THEY WILL DELIVER YOU UP
AND KILL YOU
YOU WILL BE HATED

- ⇒ The signs given already affected the Jewish nation and the Roman world in general. Verses 9-10 were specifically about the Christians. Just as Jesus was delivered up, killed, and hated, many of His people would be delivered up, killed, and hated. Acts 8:1 and Acts 12:1-2 are examples of such in the inspired text.
- ⇒ In Tacitus' record of the huge fire which took place in Rome (10 of 14 districts were burned), he acknowledged that Nero was blamed by the populace. Thus, Nero blamed and persecuted the Christians (see next page).
- ⇒ Eusebius speaks of Christians being taken into custody by the authorities and turning other Christians in.

MATTHEW 24:9-10

“But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.”

(TACITUS, THE ANNALS, BOOK 15, SECTION 44)

THEY WILL DELIVER YOU UP
AND KILL YOU
YOU WILL BE HATED

“At first several were seized who confessed, and then by their discovery a great multitude of others were convicted and barbarously executed.”

(EUSEBIUS, ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, BOOK 2, CHAPTER 25)

AN **ANALYSIS** OF
MATTHEW **24**