

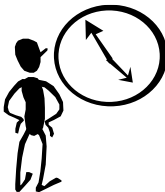
THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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Time of Assembly



Sunday:	
Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)	
Bible Study	4:00 p.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday:	
Bible Study	7:00 p. m.

The End-Times

By Terry Wane Benton

Many do not realize that scriptures have a context, and cannot be applied to everything one wishes. The “end-times” is one of the most abused topics of the Bible. Many take verses out of context. If you take a verse out of context, forget the immediate people first written to, and what **they** were to understand from the words written to them, you will likely misunderstand and misapply the Scriptures to something far removed from what the earliest readers understood.

If I take “the end” that Ezekiel talked about to Israel (Ezekiel 7) and took it from the original context (the coming Babylonian invasion) and applied it to modern times, I will have perverted the original intent. The earliest readers would not have understood that Ezekiel was writing about 2021 AD. He was writing about 586 BC. The “end” was the end of Israel and her Jerusalem temple before the Babylonians destroyed her temple and took her captive for 70 years. It was “end-times” for Israel **at that time**.

They had another “end-times” during the Roman period. This was described in Matthew 24:1-34. Another time of the end of Judaism is discussed here and it would happen in that very generation (Matthew 24:34). It happened in AD 70. The signs to look for were fulfilled in the events leading up to **that** end of Judaism.

These signs are now being misapplied again. People are taking these warnings that belonged to the first century leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, and are now taking them out of context and applying them to world events now. They did this before and during WWI, before and during WWII, and are doing it again now.

There are no signs to look for pertaining to the end of the world. All the signs were pertaining to the end of Judaism and her temple system, not the end of the world. The end of Babylon is not the end of the world. The end of Jerusalem is not the end of the world. Signs for the end of Jerusalem are not the end signs for us.

Keep each context in place. The Lord can come at any time, but there are no clues you can look for that are sure to signal that final earth day.

Misapplying the Great Tribulation

The subject matter of Matthew 24:1-34 is the fall of the Jerusalem temple. The disciples asked, “*when shall these things be?*” That question in Matthew 24:3 is in response to Jesus’ statement regarding the temple of Jerusalem that “*not one stone would be left upon another that will not be thrown down*” (Matthew 24:2). The discussion was about “*the buildings of the temple*” (Matthew 24:1). Jesus told them the signs to look for to alert them to get out of Jerusalem. “*The end*” (Matthew 24:6) discussed is not the end of the world in general, but the end of the Jewish system attached to that temple in Jerusalem. Wars, famines, and pestilences would be unusually on the rise. False teachers would try to cash in on the upheavals. Be careful of them (Matthew 24:11). There would be great tribulation, “*such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world*” (Matthew 24:21). That is the great tribulation that was to precede the destruction of Jerusalem. Matthew 24:34 says “*all these things*” would be fulfilled in **this generation** (the one He was speaking to at that moment). So, when people talk about the Great Tribulation coming in **our** future, you know they have taken it from the original context and misapplied it. This context is not discussing our times, not even discussing end times to the world in general, but speaking of the end times of Judaism that was attached to the **Temple** in Jerusalem.

People have looked at their own times in the 1915s and thought they saw the “end times” in the events of WWI. Those were scary times and people began to conjecture that this was like the signs in Matthew 24. Only they forgot that the context was not about the 1915-1918 period, but about the period leading up to the fall of Jerusalem (AD 67-70). Again, false teachers began misapplying the scriptures in the 1920s, 1930s, and especially with World War II in the 1940s. People were sure that the Great Tribulation was upon them, that Bible prophecy was now being fulfilled in their time. They were wrong again and again. The prophecies they were misusing were not about our grandparent’s times, nor of our parent’s times, and not about our times. It was about the times of that generation Jesus was talking to.

There are no signs to tell us of the end of the world. Jesus said, “*Heaven and earth will pass away*” (Matthew 24:35), but “*of that day and hour no one knows*” (Matthew 24:36). Only the Father knows and He has revealed no signs. It will come unexpectedly “*like a thief in the night.*” The signs were for the fall of Jerusalem in that generation, but the end of the heavens and the earth is not part of any signs for preparation.

The Great Tribulation is not in any biblical count-down that pre-warns us that we should now get ready. No! You should get ready and stay ready because there are **no** warning signals that give you an extra heads up. He can come at any time now, and He warned that it will come “*as a thief in the night*” (Matthew 24:43; I Thessalonians 5:2-4; II Peter 3:10). A thief does not give you advance warning. The only advance warning we have now is that nobody knows the day or the hour. We have to be wise stewards of our personal time, get ready, and stay ready. We will die and have no second chance, or we will be caught off guard when the Lord comes. Either way, we need to be wise, and we need to know that false teachers are still misusing scriptures to scare people about end-times that they know nothing about. Beware of deception!

One objection to the argument I proved is that people find worse events in history as

far as death rates are concerned and proclaim that the one before and during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was not as bad as the Holocaust. Yet, Matthew 24:21 says there never shall be a worse time. What is the meaning here? It is a figure of speech called hyperbole. It is used several other times in the Bible to give emphasis. For example, Hezekiah was said to be one who “*trusted in the Lord God*” more than any man before or after him. Better at trusting in God than Job? Better than David? Better than Jesus? When you consider all the possible comparisons, it is not likely that the description was intended to be taken in a strictly literal sense, but was a figure of speech, hyperbole, to make note that Hezekiah was a standout man of faith.

More interesting is that before the **Babylonian** destruction of Jerusalem God said He would do among them “*the like of which I will never do again*” (Ezekiel 5:7-9). Well, does that mean that the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) was worse than the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70)? No! It just means that in both cases the hyperbole was similar. In both cases, the starvation produced such desperation that Moses predicted that parents would eat their children (Deuteronomy 28:47-53). So, the warning of Moses was fulfilled twice: in the Babylonian time and in the time the Romans lay siege to Jerusalem in AD 67-70. This was the worst of times for the Jews because they not only lost millions of lives, but they lost their temple, the priesthood, and their claim to have God. God cut them off, and they are “*not His people*” (Hosea 1:6-9). That became the worst period of tribulation in history. Because of unbelief, they were “*broken off*” (Romans 11:20). They can be added back to the church of Christ if they believe in Jesus and repent, but the church of Christ is the true Israel of God (Galatians 6:15-16; Romans 2:28-29).

God proved for all time His plan to cut off fleshly Israelites who did not believe God and His Messiah, that the true spiritual Israel (the church) would remain. The Great Tribulation and fall of the center of fleshly Israel in AD 67-70 took out the earthly Jerusalem, the earthly temple, and left the heavenly Jerusalem with her spiritual temple (Ephesians 2:19f; I Peter 2:5-9; Hebrews 12:22f) to shine ever brighter as the **true** Israel of God. The Great Tribulation was fulfilled in the events that starved and killed the center of Judaism, Jerusalem, in AD 70. This is what is predicted in Matthew 24:1-34. That passage is not talking about something specific in our time.

Do not be deceived! The true Israel that has all the spiritual blessings of God is the convicted and converted people that have been called by the gospel into His church and kingdom. All blessings go to these people (Ephesians 1:3f) and all curses go to the unbelieving and disobedient. Be sure you have been grafted into the spiritual Israel of God (Romans 11:17-22). Thus, the great tribulation of AD 67-70 was a time of great difficulty before God took down fleshly Israel’s claim to God, their temple. That is the context of the great tribulation. Men are not allowed to take it out of that context and apply it to every time of difficulty of history that comes along. Beware of that!

Misapplying the “Rapture”

Many are misusing I Thessalonians 4:13-18 to teach something that is not in this text. They misapply this text to say that we are in the “end-times” and that we must get ready for “the rapture” which they say can happen at any time. This word “rapture” is not found anywhere in the Bible but is based on the Latin rendering of the words “caught up.” So, we

(Christians) will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, but it will not be for seven years as they teach. When we are “caught up” (raptured, Latin) we will ‘**ever** be with the Lord’ in that caught up position (I Thessalonians 4:17). There will be no coming back here after seven years. The Hal Lindsey scenario and the Tim LaHaye “Left Behind” series are based upon scriptures misapplied.

There will never be a time when Christians go missing from the earth for a period of seven years while a so-called “great tribulation” goes on among the “left behind.” That idea is concocted in the imagination of men but is nowhere found in the Bible.

They get the Seven years from misapplying the 70th week of Daniel 9:24-27. But that was all fulfilled in the years before and leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The clear consummation of the Jewish system was evident when the Roman armies so thoroughly destroyed the Jews, their temple, and priesthood. This is the only place premillennialists find a “seven” year period, and it is not in our future but long ago in our past.

They misapply “the Great Tribulation” from Matthew 24:1-34, which was all about the Lord’s coming in wrath to destroy the Jew’s system via the Romans destroying Jerusalem in AD 70. So, they have the “Rapture” in the wrong place. It does not precede the great tribulation, else it would have happened before AD 70 as the great tribulation did.

The passage before us, I Thessalonians 4:13-18, regards the saints being taken home to glory forever at the end of mortal time on earth. It is truly an event that is at the end of earth time. It is a day that will come “*as a thief in the night*” (I Thessalonians 5:2-4), the righteous saints will be “*caught up*” to meet the Lord in the air, and those on earth will not remain for a seven-year tribulation but will experience sudden destruction (I Thessalonians 5:3). “*These will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord*” (II Thessalonians 1:9). This is the same time that the earth will melt with fervent heat and the elements of the earth will be dissolved (II Peter 3:9-12). There won’t be seven years of heaven followed by 1000 years on the earth. The present universe will be fully dissolved. The saints will be “*caught up to meet the Lord in the air and ever be with the Lord.*”

There won’t be a rapture, then seven years of hardship to change your mind and life. Conversion to Christ must happen **now**. You won’t get another chance in a soon-coming seven-year tribulation period. That won’t happen! If you want to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and ever be with the Lord, you have got to prepare **now**. You won’t be left behind and given a chance in a so-called tribulation period to convert over to Christ. You must get ready **now**! Now is the accepted time! (II Corinthians 6:1-2). Are you ready now?

Misapplying the Signs of Matthew 24

The signs leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem are the topic of Matthew 24:1-34. It is not correct exegesis to take the signs that were to precede the fall of the temple in Jerusalem and make them about events leading up to WWI as some did in the 1915-18 period. They called those disturbing events the “signs” of Matthew 24. They were doing the same from 1930 to the 1940s, as world disturbances looked like the things in Matthew 24. But Matthew 24:1-34 had already been fulfilled in the years leading up to AD 70 when the temple was destroyed. False teachers cashed-in in 1948 when Jews were allowed to go back to their homeland after WWII. False teachers said that was a “sign” and that within 40 years (a generation) the Lord

would come back and set up an earthly kingdom. All that was what led many to follow the teaching of Hal Lindsey and others that “we can see prophecy being fulfilled in our own time.” Some set the year 1988 as the “Countdown” of end-time events. They thought 1948 plus 40 years made 1988 a certainty for the rapture (saints snatched from the earth for seven years). Every time they read world events through the lens of misapplying Matthew 24 and other scriptures, time proved them wrong again and again. Part of the problem is not rightly applying Matthew 24:1-34 to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 (which is the right application), and then failing to understand apocalyptic phrases and terminology.

In seeing world events in the Old Testament and how terminology was used to describe those events, we gain insight into how the fall of Jerusalem was a “coming” of the Lord, a judgment. When Babylon was the topic of prophecy (Isaiah 13) it was “*the day of the Lord was at hand*” (Isaiah 13:6,9). It was a day that the sun and moon and stars were darkened (Isaiah 13:10), the heavens “*shaken*” and earth “*moved out of her place*” (Isaiah 13:13). This is apocalyptic language to say that the Babylonian world would be turned upside down, not literally, but in emotional effect, much like America was rocked and turned upside down on September 11, 2001. It shook us to the core, and a bright day was dark inside our hearts. What was the day of the Lord to the Babylonians was God using the Medes (Isaiah 13:17) to bring Babylon down. That was the coming of the Lord, the sword of God was the Medes He had stirred to be the instrument God used. When God had used Babylon as His sword against Egypt and Jerusalem (Ezekiel 21, 19), to bring down His wrath on these places, it was the coming of the Lord of Hosts by means of using Babylon as His sword. He was “*riding on the clouds*” (Isaiah 19:1ff). It was the coming of the Lord against Egypt. It was His judgment against them. It was a day of darkness and clouds.

That is the language of Matthew 24:1-34 regarding the coming of the Lord against Jerusalem in AD 67-70. The “signs” were to alert the disciples of Jesus to “flee” Jerusalem before they got sealed into the city as the Romans began to surround the city. Fleeing the city (Matthew 24:15-20) is not going to help if this is the final judgment on the world. Fleeing the city because you believed Jesus enough to get out of Jerusalem is what saved Christians. They saw the “signs” and got out, while the Jews remained in the city, got sealed in, and then could not escape. They were starved over the 3 ½ years and the Romans ultimately were the sword of the Lord against Jerusalem in AD 70. It was a day of the Lord, the coming of the Lord against the unbelieving (in Jesus) Jews, a day of darkness and clouds, the judgment of the persecuting Jews who had so much blood on their hands.

Josephus, a 1st-century Jewish historian, had much to say about the gore and tragedy of those years. It was indeed the same kind of coming that we saw against Egypt, Babylon, and Jerusalem before. The same kind of language was used in all cases. To use the text to warn of “prophecy being fulfilled” now, is to lift the prophecy from its intended target and real fulfillment, and view world events through a distorted lens of misused scriptures. Beware of the modern false prophets. The Lord can come, but it is not because there are “signs” God gave us to prove this is the right time. There will indeed be a “last day,” and we need to be ready, but you can’t read world events and tie them to misused scriptures and be credible. Just be ready at all times!