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The Natural Order of Things. Matthew 24:6-8

By Elder Keith Ellis

"And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilence's, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Matthew 24:6-8

To prove all these things mentioned in the above verse actually saw their fulfillment before AD 70, let us examine scriptures showing their completion.

Concerning 'wars,' there have been wars upon the face of the earth through all time. The Old Testament records scores of battles between Israel and the Gentile nations and of the other nations against one another. As time has marched forward, there has been no letup in the number of skirmishes taking place upon the face of the earth.

Yet we find a period of 'peace' immediately precedes the period under consideration. It was a universal peace presided upon the entire Roman Empire. It is commonly referred to as the "Pax Romana." (Roman Peace). It is said to have begun in seventeen BC under the reign of Augustus.

However it was recorded during a period beginning in AD fourteen the former period of peace was shattered. Up until the time of Nero's death in AD sixty eight many incidents of war and commotion were recorded in the "Annals of Tacitus." Here we find descriptions of the interruption of the Pax Romana by war, insurrections, commotions, disturbances in a multitude of places, and among a variety of cultures across the boundaries of the Roman Empire. Josephus records many instances for us in his history "The War of the Jews."

"Wars and rumors of wars" is the second sign given by Christ to precede the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the law dispensation. Of course if we were to ask a "sign" of The Lord it would be something we would consider extraordinary. So for "wars and rumors of wars" to be a sign, peace must have been the normal way of life for the sign, otherwise "wars and rumors of wars" has no significance. If I were to ask a "sign" of God I would not ask for a blue car to drive past my house. This is ordinary and common. I would ask for something out of the ordinary and uncommon. The Lord provided *signs* which were out of the ordinary.

Yet those who remained in the city of Jerusalem were to have a direct understanding of "wars and rumors of wars."

"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh."

Luke 21:20

This, we understand from history is the time when the Roman armies under the command of Titus Vespasian would surround the city before its destruction. This move of the Roman army against the Jews was ordained of God, and foretold by Christ.

Today, there may be upwards of a hundred wars taking place at any one time. Because history has repeated itself in respect to man warring is not license to lift Matthew twenty-four from its intended time context. In order for *wars* to be a sign today, it would have to be preceded by a period of peace.

Next we consider the question of famines and pestilence's. Did these things appear before the end of the Jewish economy as Jesus said they would? The book of Acts is a wonderful source for this information.

"And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit of God that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea:"

Acts 11:28-29

This same famine is spoken of in Romans chapter fifteen verses twenty five through twenty eight and first Corinthians chapter sixteen verses one through five. This famine affected the brethren in Jerusalem. This is part of the judgment which Christ spoke against Jerusalem. It is evidence what Jesus said would take place did take place. Of course there are other instances of famine and pestilence recorded by Josephus and Tacitus. These events took place after the time Christ spoke on the Mount of Olives and before AD 70. They came to pass upon the very generation Jesus was speaking to in verse three of Matthew chapter twenty-four. It was not some future distant generation.

Even though we see similar events take place in the modern time, such as the famines in Ethiopia and Somalia, we must not force any text of scripture from its true time context and mold it to fit our own ideas. History does repeat itself. But all the events up to and including verse thirty four in Matthew chapter twenty-four were to be fulfilled in the generation of the Apostles.

What about earthquakes? Did any take place after Christ spoke of their coming? Did they take place before AD 70? Just because we see them today does it mean Matthew chapter twenty-four should be futurized?

When Jesus was upon the cross there was an earthquake of earth-shaking importance.

"Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks were rent;..."

Matthew 27:50-51

This particular earthquake signifies the death of Jesus. As the sinless and spotless Lamb of God, a sacrifice acceptable to God, which fulfillment did away with the necessity of the high priest after the order of Aaron. The way into the holiest was made open by the blood of Jesus being offered to God, once, for all. The veil in the temple was rent in twain. There was no longer a need for the figure which the veil represented. Jesus has torn down the middle wall of partition kept us from being able to approach unto God. He has made it possible for us to approach unto God's throne of grace through His blood and righteousness. There is no longer a need for the temple and its services. For the true anti-type is now manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. The type and shadows of the law were necessary no longer. It would be mockery for God to uphold the Old Covenant once the New Covenant has been instituted. So we see this particular earthquake is speaking to the people the truth that the end of the age was at hand. The law of sacrifices was ended. For the ultimate ONE TIME sacrifice had been made in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ and His work superseded the mere symbols which the law set forth. Praise be to God for this marvelous work.

Of course we know Jesus was not to be left in the grave. The next earthquake we read of testifies Jesus had raised Himself up from the dead. Remember, He had the power to lay down His life, and had the power to take it up again. In Matthew chapter twenty eight verse two we read;

"And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of The Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it."
Matthew 28:2

Of course the angel did not remove the stone so Christ could get out, he moved the stone so the disciples could look in and see Jesus was not there. They then could behold the fact the grave clothes were laying in an orderly fashion as though Jesus was still in them. But He was not. By seeing the napkin which was previously over His mouth, which was folded and set aside, they knew no grave robbery was involved in the absence of Jesus' body. They knew whatever had taken place was done in an orderly fashion. The stone having been moved they could come inside and hear the testimony of the angel of The Lord that Christ was raised from the dead. So this was a "great earthquake" in more than one respect.

Then there is the instance where Paul and Silas were in prison. It is said there was a great earthquake. The foundations of the prison were shaken, the doors of the cells opened and every ones bands loosed. (Acts 16:26)

The book of Revelation records many instances of earthquakes. Of course the majority today believe this book was written between AD 92 and AD 95. Scripture is more accurately reflected when we place the writing of Revelation at AD 68. The next time you take up to read Revelation, read it with the thought of the destruction of Jerusalem in mind. Think about the end of the law service. Consider the judgment of God upon the Jews for their murder of Jesus and all the righteous prophets. You may be surprised to find this book is not as mysterious as the modern day gloom and doom preachers would have you to believe it is. You

will also find the rest of the Bible will become amazingly consistent with the book of Revelation.

Jesus says in verse eight of Matthew chapter twenty-four, "All these are the beginning of sorrows." Note before this all the things mentioned up to this point had taken place before many times on the earth. But to this particular generation of Jews, they were to be signs which would indicate the beginning of the end of life as they knew it. Sorrow had certainly been known by other people at other periods of time. But this "beginning" was a special one. It was the beginning of the downfall of Jerusalem and was intended for no one else but those disobedient Jews who had mishandled the law and corrupted the service of God; corrupted it to the degree it was nothing like God had intended it to be. The judgment of God has now commenced on the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. This is the beginning of the end!