

Article of the Month  
September 2016

**“Of That Day and Hour”**

We will consider this month a text found in Matthew 24 which has suffered much from misinterpretation over the years. The denominations in particular have corrupted its intent, but even many careful Bible students seem to have missed the objective of its meaning.

While the context will of necessity enter into our discussion, we will begin by simply quoting the key verses:

24:35 Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words shall not pass away.  
24:36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

We have quoted the New American Standard translation because it reflects the text as modern scholarship discoveries suggest to be correct. The King James Version, for instance, omits the words, “nor the Son.”

THE PASSING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

The passing away of heaven and earth IS NOT the same as the return of Jesus at his second advent. As the matter of fact, Matthew 24 IS NOT so much about Jesus’ “coming” as it is about his “presence.” When the chapter begins, his disciples inquire, “What shall be the sign of your PRESENCE?” Very few translators have been honest enough to translate the word that way. Rotherham is one of the few who are sufficiently conscientious to translate it “presence” instead of “coming” — even though Rotherham openly admits that he doesn’t UNDERSTAND the concept. But there can be NO QUESTION that the meaning of the Greek word “*parousia*” is PRESENCE — as in “one who is already there.” It does not mean in any New Testament usage that someone is about to arrive (“coming”).

A similar usage regarding the passing of heaven and earth occurs in Revelation 20:11. This text reads:

20:11 And I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

This is very much the same setting as the Matthew 24 text. Jesus returns and assumes his authority (throne) BEFORE earth and heaven pass away. These two words (earth and heaven) represent the social order and the religious order which exist when Jesus

## Return to Article of the Month Index

returns. They are NOT HIS social or religious orders! They are the social and religious orders of the old world which Jesus will replace. Hence, as the Revelator proclaims, they FLEE AWAY from Jesus. The time BETWEEN his return and his peaceable kingdom is when this fleeing occurs. What “no one knows” (in Matthew 24:36) is when that peaceable kingdom arrives — when the old order will have completely fled away. The text DOES NOT IN ANY SENSE refer to Jesus’ second “coming.”

It IS POSSIBLE by Scripturally-supplied chronology to know the date of Jesus’ return. The Scriptures inform us that his second advent is secret for a period of time (his “*parousia*”), and that his presence is invisible — “like a thief in the night.” But, as we shall see by Jesus’ own words, the Scriptures DO NOT tell us the date when the old “heaven and earth” will pass, and the peaceable kingdom will arrive — when the whole earth will hear the voice proclaiming (Psalm 46:10), “Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth.” THAT is the date for which most of us pray. THAT is the date when heaven and earth will have passed away — the date which “NO ONE KNOWS.” Fortunately, however, we now live in the time when Jesus has taken an active part in being involved in the affairs of men. The Peaceable kingdom is, in Jesus’ own words, “at the door.”

### THE CONTEXT

The context of Matthew 24, while it is elegant in its construction, is complicated and somewhat difficult for a short discussion such as this one. However, the work which Jesus does between the time of his actual invisible return and the beginning of the peaceable kingdom is summarized in verse 31. It is a “harvest” work. (Compare Matthew 13:30 and 39-43.) It is the time when Jesus concludes the age-long work of finishing his “Church” — the 144,000 saints who will rule over the peaceable kingdom with him. (See Revelation 7:3,4 and 5:9,10.) In Matthew 24:31 we see this gathering of those saints (Psalm 50:5).

In verses 32-34 Jesus helps us to understand the proximity of the peaceable kingdom during this “harvest” — even though he says (verse 36) that he CANNOT TELL US THE DATE itself. These three verses give a little parable and an EXPLANATION of the parable. We usually call this *The Parable of the Fig Tree*. The fig tree is a Scriptural SYMBOL for the nation of Israel. We see examples of this in Jeremiah 24, in Mark 11:10-23, and in Revelation 6:13.

The parable itself is only one verse long. Jesus is telling us that when the “fig tree” (the nation of Israel) returns as a nation (with tender branches and sprouting leaves), we will know that “summer” (the peaceable kingdom) is about to appear. This is a wondrous little parable. It lets us know THE VICINITY of time for the peaceable kingdom. Israel became a nation in 1948. We are clearly getting *very close* to the peace.

In verse 33, Jesus tells us what we should expect. (The account in Luke 21:29-33 adds helpful additional information. We learn, for instance, that OTHER TREES will also come into existence. Following World War II, there was a large number of new nations born out of the break-up of colonial powers. Membership in the United Nations grew

Return to Article of the Month Index

suddenly by the addition of these many new “trees.” Luke, however, gives one additional clarification which is extremely important in interpretation of Jesus’ parable. He says [verses 30,31] that “summer” represents “the Kingdom of God.” The Matthew account says that summer means “He is near.” The NAS margin shows that the reading should be “IT” is near — the Kingdom. It is NOT a reference to Jesus’ return; it is a reference to the peaceable kingdom — “summer.”)

Back to Matthew 24. Verse 34 says that the generation which sees these things WILL NOT PASS AWAY until the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy. Thus, while Jesus didn’t (couldn’t) give us a DATE, he certainly DID give us a WINDOW OF TIME. Jesus used the word “generation” once before on the same day that he uttered this prophecy. We find this in Matthew 23:36. Because his words there WERE FULFILLED at the first advent, ***we know what he meant.*** The “generation” to whom Jesus spoke were those Jews living in his day ***who saw the destruction of Jerusalem.*** Thus we KNOW what Jesus’ intent was in telling us that the “generation” which sees the statehood of Israel would ALSO SEE the establishment of “summer” — the peaceable kingdom.

Consequently we see that “heaven and earth will pass away” and the peaceable kingdom will come before the generation alive in 1948 is all gone. The DATE yet remains hidden. But the VICINITY of the date does not!

These few words of our Lord in Matthew 24 are a stimulus to those of us who can accept them. We are on the very threshold of the greatest event in human history. All of the other “noises” and disasters around us become rather insignificant when we realize their relationship to something so grand!