

# “But What About *This Verse*?”

By Gary DeMar



CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

FOR YEARS, I have been dealing with issues related to the last days. I got involved in this topic because Christians were using last-days theology as a way to explain the state of the world and why Christians can't do anything to reverse present trends. John MacArthur is representative of this view when he writes, “Reclaiming’ the culture is a pointless, futile exercise. I am convinced,” he writes, “we are living in a post-Christian society—a civilization that exists under God’s judgment.”<sup>1</sup> A good case could be made that the people in Europe in the fifteenth century were living under a similar “post-Christian society.” Here’s how Samuel Eliot Morison opens his biography on Christopher Columbus:

At the end of the year 1492 most men in Western Europe felt exceedingly gloomy about the future. Christian civilization appeared to be shrinking in area and dividing into hostile units as its sphere contracted. For over a century there had been no important advance in natural science, and registration in the universities dwindled as the instruction they offered became increasingly jejune and lifeless. Institutions were decaying, well-meaning people were growing cynical or desperate, and many intelligent men, for want of something better to do, were endeavoring to escape the present through the study of the pagan past.

Islam was now expanding at the expense of Christendom.... The Ottoman Turks, after snuffing out all that remained of the Byzantine Empire, had overrun most of Greece, Albania and Serbia; presently they would be hammering at the gates of Vienna.<sup>2</sup>

Sound familiar? Change 1492 to any modern date, and the above description of the world of Columbus would fit just as well today. All the major characters and signs are once again in place, or so it seems.

## THE END OF WHOSE WORLD?

Prophecy pundits in the fifteenth century were sure that the end was near, just as those five hundred years before them knew it was near, and five hundred years before them.

The end of the world: the idea was taken quite seriously by Europe of the late fifteenth century--not as a mere conceit, not as a metaphor or theological trope, but as a somber, terrifying prediction based solidly on the divine wisdom of biblical prophecy and the felt experience of daily life.... [I]n the words of Joseph Grünpeck, the official historian to the Hapsburg emperor Frederick III, “When you perceive the miserable corruption of the whole of Christendom, of all praiseworthy customs, rules and laws, the wretchedness of all classes, the many pestilences, the changes in this epoch and all the strange happenings, you know that the End of the World is near. And the waters of affliction will flow over the whole of Christendom.”<sup>3</sup>



THROUGH THIS SINGLE ACT,  
MARTIN LUTHER RECLAIMED THE  
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As history attests, it was the end of the world, the end of a stagnant worldview that left people without any future hope. But a mere 25 years later, history took a dramatic change in direction. Through a single act, Martin Luther reclaimed the Bible, the gospel, and culture. The rest, as they say, is history.

What makes today's speculations about the end any more reliable? Why are today's prophecy writers any more trustworthy? They aren't. Prophetic texts that applied to the generation of Jesus' day (Matt. 24:34) are being misapplied to our generation. This is a huge mistake that has significant implications theologically and culturally.

I've made this case with a thorough study of the Olivet Discourse found in Matthew 24 and 25 as well as in Mark 13 and Luke 21. Some modern scholars have attempted to refute the first-century application of the Olivet Discourse. After having studied all of them, no one has been able to offer an exegetical and historical alternative.

### A CRITIC RESPONDS

Probably the best attempt was made by Stanley Toussaint whose critique of my position has been published on the internet. While he offers some helpful criticisms, in the end, his argument does not withstand scrutiny. He believes, for example, that

Matthew 23:39 speaks against a first-century fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse because it holds out hope for a future conversion of the Jews as a nation. Since this has not happened, Toussaint argues, the events of Matthew 24 are yet unfulfilled. He agrees that the use of "your house" (23:38) refers to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, but "verse 39 describes Israel's future repentance when they will mourn because of their great sin (Zech. 12:10)."<sup>4</sup>

As I hope to show, this distant futuristic interpretation is impossible. As R. T. France argues, the word "For, with which the verse begins, unambiguously links it with God's abandonment



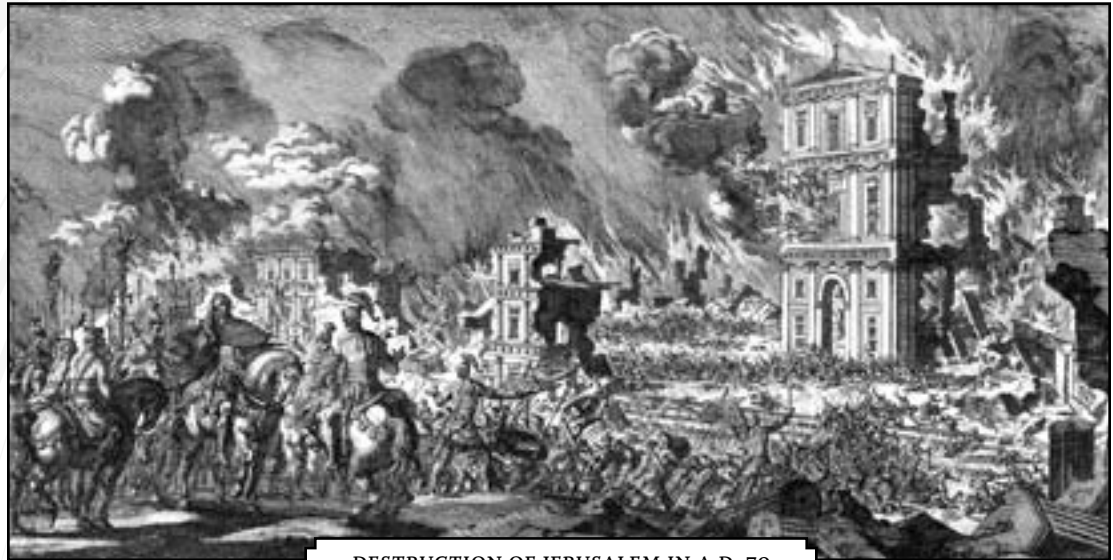
CHRIST LAMENTING OVER JERUSALEM

of his house in v. 38."<sup>5</sup> The two events are linked in first-century time, not separated by nearly two millennia. If Matthew 23:38 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, then so does what Jesus describes in verse 39 and following.

### THAT LITTLE WORD "UNTIL"

Part of the problem in understanding the relationship between verses 38 and 39 in Matthew 23 is in the way "until" is used. France contends that "the words until you say are expressed in Greek as an indefinite possibility rather than as a firm prediction; this is the condition on which they will see him again; but there is no promise that the condition will be fulfilled."<sup>6</sup> The following verses demonstrate the conditional use of "until":

- "Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent" (Matt. 5:26).
- "He was unwilling however, but



DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM IN A.D. 70

went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed” (Matt. 18:30).

- “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him” (Matt. 18:34).
- “And when it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul” (Acts 23:12).

These verses show that the results are not inevitable. Actions do not take place unless or until certain conditions are met. Until the person pays full restitution--“the last cent”--he will remain in prison. Toussaint wants to read Matthew 23:39 this way: “For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me, but one day a future generation of Jews will because they will say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’”

Jesus is describing what was necessary in order to escape the coming judgment that was to take place before that “perverse generation” passed away (Acts 2:40). Throughout the period between the crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jews cried out, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

After hearing Peter’s Pentecost message, the Jews “were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” (2:37). Peter told them that they must “repent” in order to “be saved from this perverse generation” (2:38, 40). Three thousand Jewish converts were added to the believing community “that day” (2:41). Luke records that “many of those who had heard the message [of Peter and John] believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (4:4). The restoration had begun in Jerusalem and extended throughout the Roman Empire prior to the destruction of the temple and city in A.D. 70.

#### **NO CORROBORATING EVIDENCE**

Toussaint is willing to dismiss repeated references to an impending judgment by straining to find a single passage to bolster his argument that a pre-tribulational rapture, a rebuilt temple, and the reinstatement of Old Covenant Judaism during an earthly millennium remain to be fulfilled. A careful study of the New Testament dispels such notions.<sup>7</sup> There are no verses in the New Testament that mention anything about a rebuilt temple and the reinstatement of the old covenant sacrificial system.

## CONCLUSION

Does this mean that there was no hope for these Jews after Jesus declared that their house was being left to them desolate? Not at all. As James DeYoung writes, “Although the temple shall be destroyed, a new religious order will be instituted in which the Jews are still invited to come to Christ and greet him as the Messiah within the new temple, the spiritual house that

God will build, the Church. But there is in this passage no expression of the thought that this judgment on the temple, and hence on Jerusalem as the religious center of God’s people, will ever be reversed; that God will ever return to his temple in Jerusalem and once again make it the place where he exercises his redemptive revelational relation with his people.”<sup>8</sup>



THE ROMAN TRIUMPH OVER JERUSALEM’S DESTRUCTION

## Notes

1. John F. MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience: Drawing the Line in a No-Fault, Guilt-Free World* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), 12.
2. Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942), 3.
3. Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy* (New York: Alfred F. Knopf, 1990), 29-30.
4. Stanley D. Toussaint, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse.” John 19:37 quotes Zechariah 12:10 as something that “came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled” at the time of the crucifixion (19:36). For a preterist interpretation of Zechariah 12, see Gary DeMar, “The Esther Connection in Zechariah 12,” *Selective Prophecy Works: Volume 1* (CD) (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2004).
5. R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 333.
6. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 332.
7. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).
8. James Calvin De Young, *Jerusalem in the New Testament: The Significance of the City in the History of Redemption and in Eschatology* (Amsterdam: J.H. Kok/N.V. Kampen, 1960), 89.

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