

The Book of Matthew

Last Day Events

Lesson #11 for June 11, 2016

Scriptures: Exodus 19:5-6; Matthew 23 & 24; John 12:20-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

1. In this lesson we will look at the issues connected with the second coming of Jesus Christ. The second coming of Jesus is irrevocably linked to His first coming. There was no reason for Him to come the first time if He does not plan to come back.
2. In 1863, a small group of adventists organized themselves into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They thought that the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath and the soon coming of Jesus were the most important and most prominent truths that they believed. Were they wrong about the nearness of the second coming? More than 171 years after the Great Disappointment of 1844, we are still here. What went wrong? Why has there been such a delay?

The long night of gloom is trying, but the morning is deferred in mercy, because if the Master should come, so many would be found unready. God's unwillingness to have His people perish, has been the reason of so long delay.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 194. (1868); *Ev* 694.2.

3. How could Ellen White say that there had been “long delay” in 1868? What would she say today? What would God say to us as a group and as individuals about the delay?

Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, **the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward.** But in the period of doubt and uncertainty that followed the disappointment, many of the advent believers yielded their faith.... Thus the work was hindered, and the world was left in darkness. Had the whole Adventist body united upon the commandments of [696] God and the faith of Jesus, how widely different would have been our history!

It was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be thus delayed. God did not design that His people, Israel, should wander forty years in the wilderness....

For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord's professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 4*, 1883; *Evangelism* 695.3-696.2. [Bold type is added.]

4. In 1888, there was a conflict at the General Conference session which led Ellen White to make the following statement some time later about the outpouring of the latter rain:

An unwillingness to yield up preconceived opinions, and to accept this truth, lay at the foundation of a large share of the opposition manifested at Minneapolis against the Lord's message through Brethren [E.J.] Waggoner and [A.T.] Jones. **By exciting that opposition Satan succeeded [235] in shutting away from**

our people, in a great measure, the special power of the Holy Spirit that God longed to impart to them. The enemy prevented them from obtaining that efficiency which might have been theirs in carrying the truth to the world, as the apostles proclaimed it after the day of Pentecost. The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and by the action of our own brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 234.6-235.0. [Bold type is added; content in brackets is present in the original.]

5. How do you feel about the delay in the second coming? Why do you think there has been a delay? Some of us can remember generations past who have stated with great conviction that they thought Jesus would come in their day. But, He has not yet come. Why is that?
6. For whatever reason, delay seems very often to be part of God's plan. Think about Joseph, Abraham and Sarah, Caleb and Joshua, etc.
7. In light of all of these issues, let us take a careful look at what Jesus said as recorded in Matthew 23 and 24 about the Jewish leaders in His day and then about the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming.
8. God had chosen the children of Israel to be His special people. His friends Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been promised the land of Canaan as the future home of their descendants. At the time of the exodus while camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, they received a message from God which said:
Exodus 19:5-7 (*GNB*): ⁵Now, if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own people. The whole earth is mine, but you will be my chosen people, ⁶a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests.” ⁷So Moses went down and called the leaders of the people together and told them everything that the LORD had commanded him.
9. Unfortunately, over the next 40 years, they rebelled again and again until, finally, God was forced to say that He was not taking them into the land of Canaan because they deserved it, but rather, because He had promised it to their ancestors (Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:5; 10:15; 11:9) and fulfilling that promise was necessary to uphold His Own reputation. (Exodus 32:11-12; Numbers 14:13-19; Deuteronomy 9:28-29) Unfortunately, the children of Israel did not follow through on their covenant with God.
2 Kings 21:9-11 (*GNB*): ⁹But the people of Judah did not obey the LORD, and Manasseh led them to commit **even greater sins than those committed by the nations whom the LORD had driven out of the land as his people advanced.** ¹⁰ Through his servants the prophets the LORD said, ¹¹ “King Manasseh has done these disgusting things, **things far worse than what the Canaanites did**; and with his idols he has led the people of Judah into sin.”
[Bold type is added.]
10. Second Kings 17:7-23 tells us that the northern kingdom of Israel did just about everything that one could possibly imagine to rebel against God, and they were taken into captivity by the Assyrians and never heard from again. Judah did even worse, and God “sent” them into Babylonian captivity. Seventy years later as prophesied by Jeremiah, Cyrus allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem; but, only a handful left with Zerubabel.
11. About 80 to 90 years later, Ezra and Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem with a determination to straighten things out. The result was what we now know about in Jesus's day as the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They were so busy carrying out their religious duties that they did not have time to even think about what they were doing! Could we make the same mistake? If we join the Seventh-day Adventist Church and comfortably ride along on the Adventist “bus,” will that

guarantee us a place in heaven?

12. Matthew 23 is a terrible diatribe against the Jewish leaders. Finally, in Matthew 23:38, Jesus had to say: "Your house is left to you desolate." When Jesus left the temple, it was no longer His Father's house.
13. There is an interesting statement in Matthew 23:35 that raises questions about our understanding of inspiration.

2 Chronicles 24:20-21 (GNB): ²⁰Then the spirit of God took control of **Zechariah son of Jehoiada** the priest. He stood where the people could see him and called out, "The Lord God asks why you have disobeyed his commands and are bringing disaster on yourselves! You abandoned him, so he has abandoned you!" ²¹**King Joash joined in a conspiracy against Zechariah, and on the king's orders the people stoned Zechariah in the temple courtyard.** [This took place around the year 800 B.C.]

Zechariah 1:1 (GNB): In the eighth month of the second year that Darius was emperor of Persia, the LORD gave this message to the prophet **Zechariah, the son of Berechiah** and grandson of Iddo. [He began his ministry in 520/519 B.C.] [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

14. Notice that it was not Zechariah son of Berechiah that was stoned to death; but rather, it was Zechariah son of Jehoiada! Matthew made a mistake! Does that bother you?
15. In the Hebrew Bible, 2 Chronicles is placed at the end of the Bible. (The Jews do not recognize the New Testament, of course.) So, when Jesus mentioned Abel from Genesis and Zechariah from 2 Chronicles, He was including all of biblical history, and He was recognizing that there was already a kind of "order" in the books of the Old Testament. Remember that they still were using scrolls. The kind of books we use had not been invented yet. We are not going to throw Matthew out because he made a small historical error. Matthew was human like the rest of us. Some people want to reject Ellen White because on one occasion she gave the wrong number of rooms in a hospital. Ellen White was also human.
16. As we know, a great transition was about to take place in God's relationship with the human family. No longer were the Jews His select, chosen people. After Jesus died and rose again, going back to heaven, the disciples began to understand the mission He had assigned to them; and they preached those incredible sermons at Pentecost and other times. The family of God expanded to include all who responded to His call, including Gentiles. (Read Acts 11:19-21.)
17. Read John 12:20-26. Some Greeks came from the west, requesting to see Jesus. They approached Philip who went to Andrew; together, they took the Greeks to Jesus. Jesus saw that as a foretaste of the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. It is interesting to note that wise men came from the east to celebrate His birth; and then, Greeks came from the west just before His death. Jesus always meant to appeal to the entire world.
18. Read Matthew 24:1-14. In these verses Jesus began His warnings about the future of Jerusalem and of the world.

Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves.... This entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but for those who should live in the last scenes of this earth's history.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 628.1.

19. Throughout Matthew 24, He made it very clear that the final events in this earth's history will be a terrible time for Christians. The Devil knows that if a group of Christians remain faithful, he is finished. But, fortunately, if we stay faithful and endure until Christ comes back, it will be a wonderful and unique experience. Christ has promised us a home with Him forever.

20. What did He say about the future of Jerusalem and the Jewish people? See Matthew 24:15-24.
Matthew 24:21 (GNB): ...that time will be **far more terrible than any there has ever been...**

Daniel 12:1 (GNB): ...Then there will be a time of troubles, **the worst since nations first came into existence.**

Revelation 7:14 (GNB): He said to me, "These are the people who have come safely through **the terrible persecution....**" [Bold type is added.]

21. The destruction of Jerusalem was an absolutely horrendous, awful event.

Christ saw in Jerusalem a symbol of the world hardened in unbelief and rebellion, and hastening on to meet the retributive judgments of God.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 22.1.

22. But, Jesus had warned them:

Luke 21:20-22 (NIV): "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written."

23. Fortunately, Christians took His warnings seriously, and we read about what happened.

When Christians in Jerusalem saw this happen, they fled out of the city as Jesus instructed, whereas most of the Jews were left behind and perished. It is estimated that more than one million Jews perished during the siege of Jerusalem, with 97,000 more taken captive. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, June 7)

However, during a temporary respite, when the Romans unexpectedly raised their siege of Jerusalem, all the Christians fled, and it is said that not one of them lost his life. Their place of retreat was Pella, a city in the foothills east of the Jordan River, about 17 mi. c. 27 km.) south of the Lake of Galilee.—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 499.

Pella (Ancient Greek: Πελλα, also known in Arabic as *Tabaqat Fahl*) is found in northwestern Jordan, 27.4 km (17 miles) south of the Sea of Galilee.[1] Pella represents one of ten Decapolis cities that were founded during the Hellenistic period and became powerful under Roman jurisdiction. With a history extending back into the Bronze Age, Pella expanded to its largest state during the reign of the Roman Empire....According to Eusebius of Caesarea, Pella was a refuge for Jerusalem Christians in the 1st century AD who were fleeing the Jewish–Roman wars. The fighting finally stopped when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.—"Pella, Jordan," *Wikipedia*, April 10, 2016.

But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his

apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.—Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 3.5.3.

Eusebius (Hist. Eccl. 3.5.3) and **Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus** (A.D. 315–403) (Adv. Haeres. 29.7.7–8) **mention Pella of the Decapolis as a place of refuge for the Christian community of Jerusalem in A.D. 69-70.**—Rey-Coquais, J.-P. (1992). Decapolis. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), S. Rosoff (Trans.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 2, p. 116). New York: Doubleday. [Bold type is added.]

24. It is hard to read about the destruction of Jerusalem. And it is even harder to imagine that the events just before the second coming of Jesus will be even worse!

Terrible were the calamities that fell upon Jerusalem when the siege was resumed by Titus. The city was invested at the time of the Passover, when millions of Jews were assembled within its walls. Their stores of provision, which if carefully preserved would have supplied the inhabitants for years, had previously been destroyed through the jealousy and revenge of the contending factions, and now all the horrors of starvation were experienced. A measure of wheat was sold for a talent. So fierce were the pangs of hunger that men would gnaw the leather of their belts and sandals and the covering of their shields. Great numbers of the people would steal out at night to gather wild plants growing outside the city walls, though many were seized and put to death with cruel torture, and often those who returned in safety were robbed of what they had gleaned at so great peril. The most inhuman tortures were inflicted by those in power, to force from the want-stricken people the last scanty supplies which they might have concealed. And these cruelties were not infrequently practiced by men who were themselves well fed, and who were merely desirous of laying up a store of provision for the future.

Thousands perished from famine and pestilence. Natural affection seemed to have been destroyed. Husbands robbed their wives, and wives their husbands. Children would be seen snatching the food from the mouths of their aged parents. The question of the prophet, “Can a woman forget her sucking child?” received the answer within the walls of that doomed city: “The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.” Isaiah 49:15; Lamentations 4:10. Again was fulfilled the warning prophecy given fourteen centuries before: “The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, ... and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates.” Deuteronomy 28:56, 57.

The Roman leaders endeavored to strike terror to the Jews and thus cause them to surrender. Those prisoners who resisted when taken, were scourged, tortured, and crucified before the wall of the city. Hundreds were daily put to death in this manner, and the dreadful work continued until, along the Valley of Jehoshaphat and at Calvary, crosses were erected in so great numbers that there was scarcely room to move among them. So terribly was visited that awful imprecation uttered before the judgment seat of Pilate: “His blood be on us, and on our children.” Matthew 27:25.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 31.2-

32.2.

25. Why do you think that people even in our day try to imitate Christ? After all, He was only a poor, itinerant Galilean Rabbi who was crucified as a Traitor. So, if one does not believe that He was indeed God's only Son, why would s/he be trying to imitate Him 2000 years later?
26. Fortunately, Scripture gives us a clear picture of the second coming of Christ. Read Matthew 24:27,30-31; and Revelation 1:7.
27. Jesus intends to come back Himself. (John 14:1-3) His coming will be visible to all who are living, and it will be very loud—loud enough to wake up the dead!
28. Interestingly enough, that is exactly what the Jews were hoping would occur at the time of the first coming of Jesus. Will our hopes be dashed as theirs were? Do we have any false ideas about what might happen to us and how the actual coming will take place? The second coming and the events connected with it are the Christian's ultimate hope. Without that hope, we will rot in the ground just like others!
29. However, we need to understand that either at the second coming or at the third coming, everyone will be raised from the dead. See John 5:28-29.
30. As eager as Christians have been to see the second coming of Christ, it should not be any surprise that some have tried to set a date. Read Matthew 24:36-37,42. It should be clear that since we have no way of knowing when that day will take place, we must be ready at all times.
31. Read Matthew 24:32-35. How do you explain the words in Matthew 24:34?

Dr. Richard Lehmann, writing in *The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, says that the Greek word translated “generation” corresponds to the Hebrew word *dôr*, which is often used to designate a group or class of people, such as a “stubborn and rebellious generation” (*Ps. 78:8*). Thus, Jesus was not using the word to depict time or dates but to depict the class of evil people whom He had been referring to. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, June 10.

In harmony with this OT usage, Jesus would have used the term “this generation” without a temporal meaning, to refer to a class of people. The evil generation would include all who share evil characteristics (Matt. 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38).—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 904.

In other words, evil will remain until the end of time—until Jesus comes back.

32. Read Matthew 24:42-51. In His usual style—by the use of a parable—Jesus warned us about the necessity of remaining faithful and ready at all times. The unfaithful servant was not ready when his master returned, and he suffered a terrible fate. But, those who were ready received a great reward. Eternal vigilance is our only safety.
33. Some of our Christian friends have very different ideas about the millennium and the second coming. Have you talked with any of them about it? The passages we have read today make it very clear that those alternative explanations of the second coming—in some kind of secret rapture or coming to reign as a king on earth for a thousand years—do not fit the biblical picture.
34. Read Revelation 6:9-11. Those who have been martyred are figuratively asking God why the delay. And God responds by saying, “Wait a little while longer.” Do you foresee many more martyrs in the future? Are you prepared to stand firm for the cause of God no matter what?

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