

## VIGILANCE NOT COMPUTATION

by Carl McMurray

Mark 13 is a parallel passage to Matthew 24, long used by televangelists and other religious sensationalists to excite the unlearned with signs of Christ's immediate return in our day. The obvious purpose of this exercise cannot be to teach the truth of God's word, since it is not true. We regret that the plain purpose must be to get religious people excited so that they fill the plates being passed with cold cash. Consider the purpose of the text.

After view the temple, Jesus told his disciples there was coming a time when not one stone of their great temple would be left upon another. They responded, *"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"* (Mark 13:4 ESV) Matthew adds, *"and of the end of the age?"*, but do not be confused. The disciples were NOT asking about the second coming of Jesus, as we hear it explained so often. John 12:34-35 indicates that the common understanding of the Law was that Messiah would come, and remain. They were not believing he was going to die at all, let alone be resurrected and return. Why would they ask about his return when they didn't believe he was leaving?

Jesus gave them the same warning that many today need to heed. *"Do not let anyone mislead you."* He warned them of false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and persecution to come. Then note what he says. *And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.* (Mark 13:10 ESV) We begin to get a gist of the time period he is speaking of here. Note that in 60-61 AD Paul wrote the church at Colossae and said, *...if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.* (Colossians 1:23 ESV) The gospel went into the whole world in the first century. Jesus is talking to his disciples of something that was going to happen in their lifetime, not two thousand or more years in the future.

The next section, vv. 14-18 further clarifies the issue before us. *"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter.* (Mark 13:14-18 ESV) Luke 21:20 tells us the *"abomination of desolation"* is no mysterious spiritual force, but instead is simply the gentile armies that came to surround Jerusalem. We then note that at this sign, those who pay attention to God's word given through his Son are to flee to the mountains. They are to give such haste that they are not to even go into their house to pack, or return from the field. Jesus says this fleeing of refugees will be harder on pregnant women, women with children, harder in the winter and harder on the Sabbath. Now, why in the name of common sense would this make any difference upon the return of Jesus? It wouldn't, of course, but it would matter in

70 AD at the destruction of Jerusalem. Such problems as those listed would make travel hard and slow. Once more we posit that it is NOT the second coming that is under discussion in this chapter.

Jesus then launches into some apocalyptic language, the language of the prophets. It is not our intent to interpret in this short article all that he says here. It is enough here to point to problem recognizing this text as applying to the return of Jesus. We see more evidence of this in verse 30, where he says, *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.* (Mark 13:30 ESV) As one famous chef would say, "Bam!" Jesus limits his words to THAT generation, that century, that age, that time. He speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem friend, not Jesus, return at the end of time to judge the world.

It is not wonder then that in the next five verses, the final five verses in this text, Jesus warns them four times by the words, *"keep on the alert!"* There would be no alert needed, no signs of any worth for events that would happen in over two thousand years. On the other hand, Jesus WOULD and COULD warn them about the most terrifying and tragic even in Jewish history, the destruction of the Holy City, God's temple, and the slaughter of 1.1 million Jews by the Romans in 70 AD.

Historians say that not a single Christian perished in that bloody event. This was due no doubt to the warnings and signs Jesus gave his apostles foreshadowing this event. Would that every Christian could likewise see the signs of God's power and judgment that is coming upon all the world, not just upon one nation of reprobates. Are we learning the message of Jesus to be alert? There will be no signs of his return. The apostle said he would come as a thief in the night. But, there is still the need to be alert and ready just for that reason. It is not computation of days and signs that the Bible teaches us, but the vigilance of God's child that looks for the Master's return. May not a single Christian perish in the final judgment, just like the Jerusalem judgment, but if it is to be, it will be because they listened and were obedient to God's word as those Jerusalem Christians were.