

## **COMMENTS ON CHUCK MISSLER'S PAPER "HAPPY HANUKKAH"**

(<http://www.khouse.org/articles/2005/619/print/>)

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Quoting John 10:22 Missler says that the presence of Jesus in the Temple at the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) was "an historical event that Jesus Himself pointed to as the key to understanding the prophecies concerning His return". I do not see how one can come to that conclusion from this verse or the chapter. What we have in John 10 is a record of the final rejection by the Jews of Jesus as the Messiah. He was rejected as Messiah (vv 22 - 31) and as the Son of God (vv 32 - 39). There is no key here to understanding the prophecies concerning His return. It is all about the Jews' wrong attitude to Him leading to their rejection of Him. I also fail to see what Missler calls the "mystery in John 10" or its relevance to the rebuilding of the Second Temple.

### **Missler's line of reasoning on the need for the rebuilding of the Temple**

Missler begins by tracing the historical background for the celebration of the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah). The Feast celebrates the cleansing of the Temple after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes. So - Missler asks - "why did the Holy Spirit highlight Hanukkah by alluding to it in the New Testament?" This is a good question! After all Jesus visited the Temple regularly. Indeed, a whole chapter in John's Gospel is devoted to His visit to the Temple at the Feast of the Tabernacles (John 7). And John 2:13 tells of His visit to the Temple during Passover. So why does this single verse in John 10 about the visit during Hanukkah excite such interest? This becomes clear as Missler draws our attention to the phrase "the abomination of desolation" in Matthew 24:15. This phrase is also found in the book of Daniel and Jesus is evidently quoting from that book in Matthew 24:15.

We see the connection that Missler is trying to make. He links the history behind Hanukkah (re-dedication of the Temple after its desecration) to John 10:22 (Jesus' visit to the Temple at the Hanukkah), which, in turn, he links to Matthew 24:15 (where Jesus mentions "the abomination of desolation", which will occur in 'the holy place', the Temple). And his conclusion? A Third Temple must be rebuilt from the ruins of the Second Temple so that what Jesus said in Matthew 24:15 about an abomination of desolation can be fulfilled. This is only possible when there is a physical Temple for the abomination to be committed sometime in the future. He quotes news that preparations are underway in Israel for just such a project. For instance, Jewish priests are in training to serve in the to-be-built Third Temple.

One must be cautious about the motives behind such activities by the conservative Jewish wing. These Jews want the Temple to be rebuilt but not for the same reason as Missler believes. They are not doing it for the sake of hastening Christ's return. They now have only the bit of the former Temple called the Wailing Wall which to them is a sacred site as well as a national disgrace. They want the entire Temple restored to its former glory and function for their nation Israel. As the Temple Mount is currently under the control the Muslims, you can imagine the undercurrent of fear among them at the thought that the Mount might be wrested from them by

force by Jews, with Christians aiding them.

I have difficulty with Missler's understanding of history and of his interpretation of the Bible.

1) His argument that the abomination of desolation "did not happen in AD 70" when the Romans raided and destroyed the Temple is not true. The Roman ensign of the eagle was brought into the Temple precincts. This was deeply lamented by the Jews as an abomination, however others may view it. Furthermore the Temple's sacred treasures, especially the Menorah, were taken in triumph to Rome, lost to the nation Israel.

2) Missler says, "The view that the abomination of desolation has already occurred, in addition to being historically inaccurate, also requires the bizarre allegorization of the rest of Jesus' presentation." He then adds, ironically, "Matthew 24:29 - 31 has'nt happened yet: at least not so you'd notice!" Missler is right on this point, as we shall see. But the abomination of desolation **has already happened**, as Jesus predicted. This prediction was fulfilled when the Jewish Christians saw the Roman legions advancing upon Jerusalem. They fled for their lives to Pella, Jordan, as advised by Jesus in vv 16 - 20.

### **The whole of Matthew 24 is about the second coming of Jesus**

No "bizarre allegorization", in whole or in part, is needed to interpret it thus. This lengthy reply by our Lord, occupying the whole of this chapter, was to answer the question of the disciples when they were on the Mount of Olives. Their question was: "Tell us when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24 : 3) Some interpreters see three questions in verse 3 instead of one! Be that as it may. The Lord does not appear to have structured His answer in three parts. The chapter reads as a general outline of events leading to His return. You get that sense by considering the following second-coming verses found all over chapter 24. Verse 13 is about enduring to the end, verse 22, the necessity to shorten those terrible days for the sake of the elect, verses 29, 30 concern signs in the heavens and the coming of the Son of Man, verse 36 about no one knowing the day or hour, only the Father - followed by detailed instructions, illustrated by parables, on the importance of watchfulness for His return in verses 32 – 51.

Looked at from this viewpoint, Matthew 24:15 – 20 (the passage that mentions the abomination of desolation) concern a specific event in the history of the world – namely the assault on Jerusalem by Rome. This was taught for the sake of His audience which was going to experience this particular trauma. Matthew 24:21 – 51 are about other events connected with His second coming, which, of course, have not happened yet, as Missler rightly points out. But the abomination of desolation mentioned in vv 15 - 20 had already taken place, first by Antiochus in 167 BC and then by the Roman legions in AD 70. Verse 21 from the passage about His return speaks of the "great tribulation". The great tribulation is not the same as the Roman seige of Jerusalem. The "great tribulation" is related to His return, as vv 27 and 30 plainly teach. Jesus has already dealt with the Roman invasion in vv 15 – 20 and has passed on to other events of a worldwide nature.

### **Important points to note**

The teaching about the Roman invasion is **inserted** between two passages about the Lord's second coming. That is, vv 15 - 20 (about the abomination of desolation by the Romans) are **inserted** between vv 5 - 14 and vv 21 - 51. The Roman invasion and desecration of the Temple was only one example of the many events that characterise the last days spoken of by the Lord in v 8 - the beginning of sorrows. "Therefore," warns Jesus "when you see the abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel the prophet..." He meant it to be an example of the kind of suffering Christians will undergo till He returns. Frightful as that particular Roman invasion would be, the closing stages of endtime persecution of Christians would be even more horrifying. This "**great tribulation**" (v 21) will be attended by cosmic signs. It will happen at a time when Christianity has already been preached to the world. Pay attention to v 14, which speaks of a time when the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached throughout the world. This enables false Christs to flourish and deceive many with signs and wonders. Compare this passage with the signs and lying wonders taught by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. All this will only serve to usher in His glorious return (vv 27- 29).

3) There are Christians who have been taught that they will be taken up (raptured) so that they will not go through the suffering of the great tribulation. The Bible is clear that Christians will go through the tribulation, as is evident even in Matthew 24. Could those who hold the view of a pre-tribulation rapture grant the possibility that they might be wrong in their interpretation of the Bible on this point? Assuming they are wrong, how do you think the average Christians will react when they find themselves apparently 'left behind'? Will they despair that they have been misled by the Bible? by the God whom they have been led to believe will rapture them 'to escape the wrath to come'? What will they think of their pastors and Bible teachers who have confidently assured them that they will be in heaven when the persecution begins?

4) There is a large group of American Christians, to which President Bush apparently belongs, who believe that an earthly **interim** earthly kingdom is taught in Scripture. Towards that end and to hasten Christ's return they insist that the Temple must be rebuilt so that the abomination of desolation as described in Matthew 24 (but already fulfilled, as explained above) can be enacted by the 'man of sin' in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 – who sits as God in the temple of God. The temple of God in this passage is not necessarily the Temple in Jerusalem and there are several interpretations to it.

5) As for the coming kingdom of God, the Lord is going to bring in **a new heaven and a new earth (see Revelation 21)**. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. He says so Himself (John 18:36). There will be a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:10 – 13). It is noteworthy that the apostles did not write anything about an earthly kingdom in the Bible once they understood that Jesus did not mean to set up an earthly kingdom. Nor did they yearn for or write about the day when the Temple would be rebuilt. They remembered what the Lord said as He left the Temple.

"Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down" Mark 13:2

We too are not looking for an earthly kingdom with a government established in Jerusalem where

Christ sits on an earthly throne. We are not looking for a restored earthly Temple where Old Testament worship is reestablished and again lambs are sacrificed to atone for human sins. The old ceremony, even as a ceremony, would be an insult to the Cross. All that is past and gone with the first Advent, with Calvary and with the Resurrection of our Lord. So Hebrews 9 and 10, 1 Peter 1:18 - 20 very emphatically and clearly affirm. We are humbled to learn that our bodies are already the temple of the Holy Spirit who indwells all true believers (1 Corinthians 6 : 19 - 20, 15 : 50). We believe that Christ will return very soon to bring true peace and true righteousness. This new kingdom, not of this present earth, will begin with God's righteous judgement on all humankind (Revelation 21:5)

Jesus said:

**"And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." Matthew 24:14**

There is no interim kingdom. Maranatha! Even so, come Lord Jesus!

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