

October 2020

Frank W. Nelte

THE PROPHECIES OF MATTHEW 24 PART 2

WHERE IS THE PLACE OF SAFETY?

In the previous article we covered the first 15 verses of Matthew 24. The apostles had asked two questions in verse 3, and Jesus Christ answered those questions in verses 4-14. Starting with verse 15, Jesus Christ then starts to present some conclusions that we need to draw from knowing the general outline of what lies ahead. We covered Jesus Christ's reference to the Prophet Daniel in Matthew 24:15.

JESUS CHRIST'S INSTRUCTIONS

The next five verses apply to the people who understand Daniel 11:31-32 correctly. We must understand Daniel 11:31-32 correctly so that we can see which of the following instructions will apply to our specific circumstances.

Then **let them which be in Judaea flee** into the mountains: (Matthew 24:16)

This instruction applied only to the fulfillment in 68-70 A.D. It does not apply to the fulfillment that has taken place in our age. Why? In our age there were no people "who know their God" in Jerusalem, and, even more important, **the fulfillment in our age did not involve the destruction of Jerusalem**. It only involved the throwing down of "spiritual Jerusalem", i.e. the scattering of the Church of God.

Don't confuse the yet future destruction of Jerusalem with what happened when the "appalling things" were placed in the spiritual temple of God. In plain language: **the abomination that makes desolate for our age is already past tense!** It is already history, even as the original abomination of desolation was already history at the time of Christ's ministry.

The abomination that made desolate in our age took place after Mr. Armstrong had died, when **"detestable things" were then methodically introduced into the Church of God**. We usually just call those detestable things "heresies".

Understand the following:

"The abomination of desolation" for our age must obviously take place some time before Jesus Christ returns. But "the abomination of desolation" does not occupy any specific time-slot in the events that culminate in Christ's second coming. Knowing when the abomination of desolation was set up tells us nothing regarding how much time is left before Jesus Christ returns.

Now this instruction in verse 16 applied only to those of God's people who would find themselves in a very specific geographic location, i.e. in Judea. This instruction did not apply to any of God's people at that time in history who were outside of Judea (e.g. in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Galatia, in Babylon, etc.).

Let's see the next two instructions together.

Let **him which is on the housetop** not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let **him which is in the field** return back to take his clothes. (Matthew 24:17-18)

Now the only people of God who had to flee were those in Judea. So these two instructions likewise applied only to those who were in Judea at the time of the 68-70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Both statements convey **a sense of urgency**. For God's people in Judea at that point in time, the instruction was: the minute you realize that you are supposed to flee, you start your flight that same minute. **Don't go back for anything!** Not even for your clothes! Just go! If you leave right away, God will protect you. But if you first want to collect your wealth or belongings, then you will be on your own.

Now where **verse 16** does not really have an application for a fulfillment in our time, **verses 17-18 do apply to our time as well!** However, they do not apply to "fleeing" in response to the abomination of desolation. With the fleeing from the abomination of desolation we do (and we did!) have time to go back into our houses and to evaluate things at our own pace. **We had the opportunity to flee over a period of time** from the appalling things that Worldwide introduced. And so for us verses 17-18 don't apply in the context of fleeing when the abomination was set up.

Rather, for us the principles of **verses 17-18 apply** when the yet future instruction comes to flee to **the place of safety**. So in our time these instructions will apply as a response to a different situation.

When God sends us the message that we are to flee, and **if we are certain that this is a message from God**, and **not** from **some zealous fanatic** who tries to preempt God, then we too need to flee immediately ... without trying to first gather all the "stuff" we feel we might need. **The sense of urgency** that applied to the first fulfillment will also apply to the yet future instruction to flee to the place of safety.

Let's see the next instruction.

And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! (Matthew 24:19)

This instruction implies that **there may be some hardships involved** in fleeing to save our lives. In such situations everything becomes more difficult for expectant mothers and for nursing mothers. This fleeing in verse 19 will also involve a test of faith. And this instruction certainly applied to the first fulfillment in 68-70 A.D.

In our age the "fleeing" in response to the abomination of desolation involved **fleeing from the church organization** which had accepted "detestable teachings", and then looking for a new spiritual home. That fleeing did not involve physical hardships.

But when it comes to **the yet future physical fleeing to the place of safety**, then verse 19 may also apply again. There may be physical hardships for expectant and nursing mothers. These are after all the words of Jesus Christ Himself. So we should not take them lightly.

Let's look at the next instruction.

But **pray you that your flight be not** in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: (Matthew 24:20)

This statement shows that Jesus Christ clearly accepted Sabbath-keeping for the future, that the Sabbath will still be in force when Jesus Christ's second coming is approaching. The Sabbath was never done away, and this is one more Scripture that affirms this.

In this verse Jesus Christ has presented two different circumstances. "Winter" is a part of the annual seasonal cycle. "The Sabbath" is a God-instituted law, totally independent of any seasonal changes.

In winter conditions may be more difficult for fleeing. In winter we would still have to flee, but be prepared to face some additional hardships. The Sabbath, on the other hand, does not present any additional hardships, but it presents the prospect of breaking a law of God. Jesus Christ's statement obviously implies that **we should not be using the Sabbath to flee**. Telling us to pray that our flight will not be on a Sabbath day means that if we do maintain regular contact with God through daily prayer, then God will see to it that we receive the instruction to flee on a day other than the weekly Sabbath.

That is important because we are supposed to start fleeing immediately, without wasting any time. But if we only find out on a weekly Sabbath that we are to flee, then Jesus Christ here strongly implied that we should delay fleeing until the Sabbath has ended. But that may be valuable time that is squandered, and we may end up having trouble trying to flee once the Sabbath has ended.

The main point that sticks out forcefully from these five verses is that **we must respond immediately once we find out that we are to flee**. And the fleeing must not be on a weekly Sabbath.

Now here is a very valid concern.

There is the **very real fear** here that **some fanatic** will tell his followers to follow him out into some wilderness area. And because of fear some people might just follow that fanatic, as has happened at different times in the past. **So how can we possibly know for sure** that the call to flee is really from God? We want to follow God, and not some charismatic church leader, right?

Here is the answer to this potential difficulty.

God's instruction to flee will come to us through the two witnesses. **Any call to flee before the two witnesses start their ministry will be from a false leader who is not really a servant of God**. The credentials of the two witnesses, on the other hand, will be **the miracles** they will be performing, and **the deaths** of all those who seek to harm them (Revelation 11:5).

It is through the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3 that God will communicate to His people the instruction to flee. And once we see the start of their ministry, that should give us confidence that they both are indeed true servants of God. We should not accept the two witnesses as God's chosen servants until after we see **the evidence of their ministry**.

After these instructions about fleeing, Jesus Christ then added more details for the ending part of the story, i.e. for the time in which we are living right now.

GREAT TRIBULATION

For **then shall be great tribulation**, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. (Matthew 24:21)

In 2018 I wrote a 10-page article entitled "GREAT TRIBULATION AND THE GREAT TRIBULATION", which discusses this verse in great detail.

Briefly, the Greek expression "thlipsis megale" means "great affliction" and "great anguish", etc. This term without a definite article is not a name for an event or an occasion. It is simply **a descriptive term**.

We have chosen to use this term "the great tribulation" as the name for the time of trouble that will precede the second coming of Jesus Christ. But **nowhere** in the New Testament **is this term ever used as a name** for an occasion.

So here in verse 21 Jesus Christ tells us that there will be **a time of extreme stress and anguish** at some point after "the abomination of desolation" has been set up, i.e. at some point **after the Church of God was defiled** with detestable teachings which were methodically introduced.

That time of extreme anguish will affect the whole world. Jesus Christ continued to say:

And **except those days should be shortened**, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. (Matthew 24:22)

So this time of extreme affliction would ultimately result in the extinction of human life, which is really Satan's goal. Satan wants to see all life destroyed. But God will not let that time of affliction continue to that otherwise inevitable conclusion. God will cut that time short.

So understand the following:

It is not the total period of time allotted to humanity to do its own thing before Jesus Christ returns, that will be shortened. The whole period from the creation of Adam down to Jesus Christ's second coming is not at all shortened. **That period is in fact lengthened**, since today in the year 2020 A.D. we are already at **more than 6,020 years after Adam's creation** (Adam was created around 4005 B.C., give or take 5 years. See my 2013 article "Chronology Back To Adam".)

The only thing that will be shortened is the time of severe trouble that precedes Jesus Christ's return. In other words, while three and one half years are allotted for that time of trouble, God may decide to shorten **that period** to only three years, or perhaps even to only two and one half years?

But when, to use arbitrary numbers as an illustration, the overall period already exceeds 6,000 years by more than 20 years, then cutting six months or even a full year out of the period of trouble at the end doesn't shorten the whole period before Christ's second coming at all. That whole period then exceeds 6,000 years by 6 or 12 months less than it would otherwise have exceeded 6,000 years, if that period of severe trouble would not have been cut short.

You follow?

So the time allotted to the overall plan of salvation is lengthened by a few decades, but the time allotted to one specific event within that overall plan is shortened by a few months, or even by a whole year.

What Jesus Christ's statement here tells us is that **God's time-frame is flexible!** Where necessary, God will lengthen the time for some things, and where necessary to preserve human life, God will shorten other things. These decisions are dictated by **the need to achieve the goals** that God has established for His plan. God's goals will be achieved! And God has all the time in the world at His disposal. God owns time. For God **time is a useful tool**, and time is never a dictator or taskmaster, which would somehow demand of God that certain things must be done at specific times.

Jesus Christ followed this statement with some warnings for true Christians.

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here *is* Christ, or there; **believe it not**. (Matthew 24:23)

People don't say to us: here is Christ. Rather, they say something like: **"this is when Christ will return.**

And therefore **we must prepare** for His return". False prophets will be saying these things **to preempt** the instructions that God will give His people through the two witnesses. When the time comes, God will give the instructions to flee through the two witnesses. False prophets seek to preempt those instructions to gain followers, as well as to discredit the things the two witnesses will later be preaching.

Now if someone were to actually claim that Jesus Christ has already returned, then that would obviously also be totally false.

In Revelation 11:3 Jesus Christ refers to the two witnesses as "**My** two witnesses". This means that when they start their ministry, Jesus Christ will simply not have any other "witnesses". There will not be anyone else anywhere on earth at that point in time, who will be speaking for Jesus Christ. The two witnesses will be the only two people God will work through at that time, in communicating God's messages and instructions to humanity.

So before the two witnesses have started their ministry, if anyone says "this is when Jesus Christ will return" then such people will be false ministers, who have not been sent by God (the principle of Jeremiah 23:21, etc.). And once the two witnesses have started their ministry, then false prophets will no longer try to predict Jesus Christ's second coming; then their efforts will instead focus on opposing the two witnesses.

Jesus Christ tells us: don't believe those false prophets.

For there shall arise **false Christs**, and **false prophets**, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect. (Matthew 24:24)

Our world today is inundated with false Christs and false prophets. You can find them on the radio, on TV and on the internet. And all of them try to impress us. And usually such people also want our money.

What Jesus Christ is also telling us in this verse is that **these false prophets will deceive the great majority of people**. It is only the people who have the spirit of God within themselves that will not be deceived. The thing that will expose the true source of inspiration for the false prophets is that they will promote teachings and beliefs that are contrary to the truth of God. Their "fruits" will expose them, but only to the people who have God's spirit.

Behold, I have told you before. (Matthew 24:25)

Jesus Christ has warned us in advance to expect large numbers of people who would promote heresies. And regrettably we don't have a shortage of heresies amongst us today. And this includes heresies regarding Christ's second coming.

Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is **in the desert**; go not forth: behold, *He is in the secret chambers*; believe *it* not. (Matthew 24:26)

This is talking about false leaders before the time when the two witnesses start their ministry. Through such false leaders Satan will be seeking to preempt the instruction God will give His people through the two witnesses, to flee to the place of safety. Such preemptive calls to go out to some desert area will be aimed at discrediting the still future instructions for God's people to flee to the place of safety.

The false prophets will say: Christ has returned, or is returning, in secret. The two witnesses will say: Christ is returning very openly, like lightning.

So if anyone other than the two witnesses tells you to go out to some desert or semi-desert area, or to

some cave or some mountains, or to any other way out place, then you are dealing with a false prophet. The two witnesses will be telling us to go to the place of safety **for protection** three and one half years before Christ will return. The two witnesses will not claim that Christ has already returned.

Jesus Christ then continued to explain:

For **as the lightning** comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. (Matthew 24:27)

A long flash of lightning in the sky above us is unmistakable. It is not hidden. In fact, it is followed by a powerful thunderclap, to make sure we really get it. And it can be seen by all.

Christ's second coming will be unmistakable.

And then Jesus Christ gave a cryptic clue regarding His second coming.

THE CRYPTIC CLUE

In this context of speaking about His return being like a flash of lightning Jesus Christ then said:

For wheresoever the carcass is, **there will the eagles be gathered together**. (Matthew 24:28)

What this statement says is that **eagles are attracted to dead bodies**, to carcasses. So a carcass may attract more than one eagle.

Now Jesus Christ inserted this statement into the context of His second coming. Christ knew that nobody in the world would understand the real significance of this statement.

So why did He include this statement?

After telling us that His second coming will be like a powerful flash of lightning, this statement provides a clue as to **where God's people will be "gathered together"** at that point in time. Here is what this clue reveals.

The same Jesus Christ spoke to Job in the Old Testament, as recorded in the Book of Job. All of Job chapter 39 presents the words of Jesus Christ. In that chapter there is not a word from Job or from anyone else. This chapter records only **the words of Jesus Christ**.

So let's notice what Jesus Christ told Job. The whole chapter in essence says: just who do you think you are, Job? Why, you don't have any power at all over any part of the creation. You're not really very important.

After talking about "the hawk" in verse 26, Jesus Christ then devoted the next **four verses** to tell Job something about eagles. Let's notice Job 39:27-30.

27 Does **the eagle** mount up at your command, and make her nest on high?

28 She **dwells and abides on the rock**, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place.

29 From thence she seeks **the prey**, and her eyes behold afar off.

30 Her young ones also suck up blood: and **where the slain are, there is she.**

So Jesus Christ here told Job that the eagle looks for dead bodies, "the slain". The eagle looks for carcasses. That is the link to Matthew 24:28.

Now the main thing these verses tell us about the eagle is where the eagle "dwells and abides". Jesus Christ told Job that the eagle dwells "on the rock". The Hebrew word here for "rock" is "sela" (also sometimes rendered as "cela"). **The equivalent Greek word for Hebrew "sela" is "petra".**

So in the Greek translation Jesus Christ told Job that **the eagle dwells and abides in "petra"**. That is where the eagle is, according to Jesus Christ. So what was Jesus Christ telling us with this statement in Matthew 24:28?

I believe that with this statement Jesus Christ was giving us a disguised hint, that if we want to know **where God's people will be gathered** when Jesus Christ returns "like lightning" (verse 27), **then we should look at** where the eagle lives.

So is this proof that the place of safety will be in Petra? No, it is not at all proof for this. But does it open up the possibility that Petra might perhaps be the place where God's people will be protected? Yes, I suppose that it opens up that possibility.

But here is the point we should consider:

In the days of Job, well before the time of Moses, **the place that today has the name "Petra"** did not yet have that name "Petra". The name "Petra" was only given to that area more than a millennium after the time of Job. Without "sela" in Hebrew (or "petra" in Greek) being the name for one specific location on earth, the word "sela" really just means: **rock** or **crag** or **cliff** or even **strong hold**.

Now I do believe that Matthew 24:28 was intended by Jesus Christ to give us a clue regarding the place of safety. I believe that the place of safety will be in **a rocky area**, or **a mountainous area**, or an area that could be called **"a strong hold"**.

In other words, I look upon the Hebrew word "sela" (or the Greek word "petra") in Job 39:28 as a **descriptive term** and **not** as **a name** for a specific location. This means that the location today named "Petra" is certainly a possibility for the place of safety. **But so are several hundred other locations on earth!** We can find several hundred locations around the world, including other places in the Middle East, that qualify for the description "sela" in Hebrew, or "petra" in Greek.

Are there other Scriptures that also imply that Petra could perhaps be the place of safety? Well, there are the first few verses in Isaiah 16 that may perhaps apply to the place of safety. Verse 1 applies to Christ's second coming, and it says:

Send you **the Lamb** to the ruler of the land **from Sela** to (or "in") the wilderness, **unto the mount** of the daughter of **Zion**. (Isaiah 16:1)

"The Lamb" is a reference to Jesus Christ. "Unto the mount of the daughter of Zion" is a reference to Mount Zion in the area of Jerusalem. The context is about the second coming of Christ.

So Isaiah 16:1 is speaking about **Jesus Christ** at the time of His second coming **being sent from one place to another**. The place He will be coming from is identified as "sela in the wilderness", and the place He will be going to is identified as "Mount Zion in Jerusalem".

Now **the reason Christ will be going to Mount Zion** in Jerusalem is pretty obvious. He is going there because at His second coming **He will stand on Mount Zion** with the 144,000 in the first resurrection. See Revelation 14:1. Notice that in Revelation 14:1 Jesus Christ is also identified as "a Lamb", the same as in Isaiah 16:1. These two Scriptures go together.

The reason why Christ will be coming from "sela in the wilderness" should also be clear. Christ will come from there because **that is** where He meets up with all those who had been protected in the place of safety, and who will be changed into spirit beings in the twinkling of an eye.

So when Jesus Christ returns, **He comes to** where His people are gathered in the place of safety, but without actually "touching down" on the Earth. Instead of Christ "touching down", the converted Christians will be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and they will meet the returning Christ **in the air**. The resurrection for all the righteous dead will be taking place at the same time.

At some point after He has collected His "Bride", the 144,000, Jesus Christ will then go around the earth like lightning, so that "every eye shall see Him" (see Revelation 1:7). Now what "every eye" will see is not the face of Jesus Christ. What they will see is "the lightning" of His return, i.e. the light that accompanies Christ traveling through the air around the world.

After that Jesus Christ and the 144,000 head for Mount Zion, where they will descend vertically to the earth. From Mount Zion Jesus Christ will then rule as King of kings and as Lord of lords for the entire millennium and the 100-year period.

By now some of you might be saying: wait a minute, in the past you told me that Jesus Christ will return to the Mount of Olives, and from there He will then go to Mount Zion. So how can Christ be returning to the people in the place of safety? Will Christ's first point of return be to the Mount of Olives, or will it be to "sela in the wilderness"? **Which is it?**

Yes, I have in the past said that Christ will **first** return to the Mount of Olives, based on Acts 1:11-12. But **I now believe that I was wrong in this matter**. Here is why.

Jesus Christ departed from this earth from the Mount of Olives. See Acts 1:9. So the apostles all looked up to heaven as Jesus Christ then disappeared out of their view. Then two angels appeared to them (Acts 1:10). The angels then said:

Which also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, **shall so come in like manner** as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)

Acts 1:12 then identifies the place from which Jesus Christ ascended into heaven as "the Mount of Olives".

Now **do these verses actually tell us the location to which Jesus Christ will return?** Well, no they don't. What did the angels say? Did they say that Christ would return to the Mount of Olives? Well, no, they didn't say that. So what did the angels say?

The angels only spoke about **the manner** in which Christ would return. But that "manner of return" could apply to any location on earth. The manner in which Christ ascended into heaven was that **He rose vertically into the sky until He disappeared from view**. So the angels were saying that when Jesus Christ returns, then **He will descend vertically from the sky**. Only at that point in time He will have 144,000 resurrected individuals with Him, as well as all the holy angels (Matthew 25:31).

"The manner" does not refer to location. I had simply wrongly assumed that the account in Acts 1 implies that Christ will return first to the Mount of Olives. But that passage does not really imply the location for Christ's return.

However, Jesus Christ will **at a later time** go to the Mount of Olives. That is made clear in Zechariah chapter 14. Let's understand that Jesus Christ only goes to the Mount of Olives once, not twice.

So let's try to piece together a sequence of events at the time of Jesus Christ's return.

A SEQUENCE OF EVENTS AT THE SECOND COMING

Here is a very general outline.

- 1) The **place of safety** is in "sela in the wilderness", **an unknown location**.
 - 2) So Jesus Christ returns first to the air **above** this "sela in the wilderness" (Isaiah 16:1). At that moment the first resurrection takes place. The converted people on the ground at "sela in the wilderness" are changed in the twinkling of an eye, and **they rise up into the air** to meet with Christ. At the same time the first resurrection will be taking place. Christ will be meeting His "bride". All the holy angels will also be there with Jesus Christ.
 - 3) **Then** Jesus Christ and all those with Him return to heaven for "**the wedding supper**" in the presence of God the Father. In terms of how we human beings perceive time, this need not take much time at all. God perceives time differently from the way we do (e.g. with God 1,000 years are like one day, etc.).
 - 4) **Then** Jesus Christ and the 144,000 and all the holy angels **return** to this earth and, without "touching down" anywhere, **go around the earth** like lightning, so that "every eye shall see Him" (see Revelation 1:7). "Every eye" will not perceive that there will be 144,000 sons of God accompanying Jesus Christ on those trips around the earth. "Every eye" will only see this return as some type of "lightning".
- It is only **after the wedding supper** that Jesus Christ returns as "King of kings" (Revelation 17:14 and Revelation 19:16), because those other "kings" are only given their kingly status at the wedding supper. When "every eye shall see Him" Jesus Christ will already be King of kings. Therefore the condition referred to as "every eye shall see Him" can only take place after the wedding supper. And from then onwards the 144,000 will be with Christ.
- 5) Up to this point Jesus Christ has not actually returned to the earth in the sense of standing somewhere on the earth. He has not yet touched the earth with His feet.
 - 6) So **then** Jesus Christ and the 144,000 go to **the air over Mount Zion** in Jerusalem. And they all descend vertically to Mount Zion. They will stand on Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1). That will be the location from where Jesus Christ will rule as King of kings and Lord of lords.
 - 7) The first acts of ruling from Mount Zion will be to oversee **the pouring out of the seven last plagues** of Revelation 15-16. Those plagues all take up some time, very likely several weeks. Plague number six involves sending out three specifically selected demons, "like frogs".

For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, *which* go forth unto the kings of the earth and of **the whole world, to gather them to the battle** of that great day of God Almighty. (Revelation 16:14)

That may require **many weeks**, possibly even several months. Armies and armed individuals from all countries around the world have to make their way to the Middle East. They are physical mortal human beings who need food every single day. Many millions of armed individuals will have to cover thousands of miles just to get there for that battle. This will be an enormous undertaking.

Those three demons will goad those rebellious human beings into doing **whatever it takes to get there**, to defend this earth against "an invasion from outer space", where the "outer space invaders" have made a "touch down" in the area of Jerusalem.

8) Once those demons have gathered all the armies from around the world to Jerusalem, then we come to Zechariah 14:2.

For **I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle**; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. (Zechariah 14:2)

Jesus Christ will allow those human armies of anti-God rebels to experience a fleeting measure of success. They will feel like they are winning. Only then does Jesus Christ step in.

Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle. (Zechariah 14:3)

9) **The start** of Jesus Christ fighting against those rebellious human beings marks the start of **the seventh plague** being poured out. The battle that follows constitutes that seventh plague (see Revelation 16:17-21). Now **the signal for the start** of that totally one-sided battle will be **when Jesus Christ's feet "touch down" on the Mount of Olives**.

10) With that signal given, there is **a huge earthquake** and the Mount of Olives is split down the middle. That earthquake starts the moment Jesus Christ's feet touch the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives divides into two as **a direct consequence** of Jesus Christ's feet touching that mount.

And his feet shall stand **in that day** upon the mount of Olives, which *is* before Jerusalem on the east, and **the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof** toward the east and toward the west, *and there shall be* a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. (Zechariah 14:4)

Here the expression "in that day" is not a reference to the day Jesus Christ returns! It is a reference to **the day on which the seventh plague of Revelation 16 is poured out**. That day will be weeks later, perhaps even months after the day on which Jesus Christ "touched down" on Mount Zion. Christ will give rebellious humanity the opportunity to gather together to fight against Him.

11) At the same time as that earthquake divides the Mount of Olives, there will be **earthquakes around the world, destroying all major cities**. Those earthquakes will change the topography of this planet earth, to the point where **"every island fled away, and the mountains were not found"** (see Revelation 16:20). And then gigantic hailstones will utterly smash every remaining vestige of human activities over the past approximately 6,000 years (verse 21). All underground mine shafts and tunnels worldwide will collapse.

12) The result will be that all the human armies will be totally destroyed, and all opposition to Jesus Christ will have been put down. **At that point Jesus Christ's millennial rule will start** in a practical way, beginning with healing this planet.

That's the general outline. Can we see how "coming from sela in the wilderness" and "Mount Zion" and "the Mount of Olives" all tie into the overall picture? The final battle in Zechariah 14 is weeks, if not months after the day when Jesus Christ will actually return to this earth.

Now let's take another look at Isaiah 16.

ISAIAH 16

We have already briefly discussed verse 1. Let's look at it again:

Send you the Lamb **to** the ruler of the land from sela in the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion. (Isaiah 16:1)

This rendering actually contains **a subtle mistranslation!** It implies that there are two different individuals involved here. As it stands here, this translation implies that Jesus Christ is **sent to somebody**. But that is false! That is not what the Hebrew text says. The Hebrew text of this verse neither contains nor implies **the preposition "to"**.

The Hebrew text in fact clearly indicates that **"the Lamb" and "the ruler of the land" are one and the same individual**.

The Hebrew text here should be punctuated as follows. Note the first two commas.

"Send you the Lamb, the ruler of the land, **from** sela in the wilderness, **unto** the mount of the daughter of Zion."

Next, the Hebrew noun "erets" here translated as "land" actually means **"the whole earth"**. And that is the intended meaning here. Jesus Christ is "the Lamb", and at the same time Jesus Christ is also "the ruler of the whole earth".

Now nobody except God the Father ever "sends" Jesus Christ anywhere. So here God the Father is sending Jesus Christ **from** "sela in the wilderness" **to** Mount Zion, from where Jesus Christ will rule the whole earth.

So verse 1 tells us:

God the Father will send "the Lamb", after He has picked up His Bride at "sela in the wilderness", and after the marriage supper, to rule over the whole earth from Mount Zion.

This is information we already know from other parts of the Bible, except for **one specific detail**. That one specific detail, which is not mentioned in any other statement in the whole Bible, is that when Jesus Christ comes to Mount Zion with the 144,000, He will in fact have started that trip at "sela in the wilderness".

[From "sela in the wilderness" Jesus Christ will have led everyone back to heaven for the marriage supper, then returned to this earth and gone around the earth like lightning, and then ended the trip by coming to Mount Zion.]

This is a very significant detail, which most people have never understood. When we see the 144,000 with Jesus Christ on Mount Zion in Revelation 14:1, people have never asked: **how did the 144,000 get**

to Mount Zion?

They have just been resurrected, and on their own they wouldn't know where to go. Being resurrected doesn't automatically give them the knowledge of what they are supposed to do, and where they are supposed to go.

This is where Isaiah 16:1 fills in the missing information.

One second those in the place of safety are physical mortal human beings, and then in the twinkling of an eye they are changed into spirit beings, and they see the returning Jesus Christ in the air above them. At the same time the holy angels are escorting all the righteous dead who have just been resurrected from wherever on earth they may have died to the atmosphere above the place of safety. So all 144,000 (i.e. the Bride) are then with Jesus Christ in the air above "sela in the wilderness". And **from there they all go with Jesus Christ to Mount Zion** (i.e. by way of the marriage supper).

That completes the first ever trip taken by all those who will be in the first resurrection. In the process they will have learned how to get to God the Father in heaven, and they will also have seen the whole earth in their trips around the earth "like lightning" with Jesus Christ. So when they then land on Mount Zion with Jesus Christ, they will already have received a certain amount of "orientation" for their new existence as spirit-born sons of God. But we are getting ahead of the story.

Now the event described in verse 1 is obviously still future. It refers to events surrounding Christ's second coming. So let's notice the next verse.

For it shall be, *that*, **as a wandering bird cast out of the nest**, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Arnon. (Isaiah 16:2)

"A wandering bird cast out of the nest" presents the picture of a bird looking for a new home that will provide some security. Note that this bird is presented as an "outcast". And "outcasts" in the following verses refers to: **those who are driven out, thrust out, banished**.

Here is the next statement.

Take counsel, execute judgment; make your shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; **hide the outcasts**; bewray not him that wanders. (Isaiah 16:3)

The Hebrew verb here translated "bewray" means: to uncover, to remove, etc. So this verse says:

- 1) The night is invisible at noon. So the expression "make your shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday" means: **make yourself invisible**.
- 2) **Hide the outcasts**. Once they are hidden, then these outcasts are invisible to those who are searching for them.
- 3) **Don't uncover** him that wanders.

This whole verse is focused on hiding some people. Let's see the next verse.

Let My outcasts dwell with you, Moab; **be you a covert to them** from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceases, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. (Isaiah 16:4)

The Hebrew word translated "covert" means: a secret, a covering, **a hiding place**, etc. The Hebrew

word translated "spoiler" is actually a verb which means **"to destroy violently"**.

So this verse speaks about God's outcasts, stating that **Moab should provide for God's outcasts a hiding place from persecutors who destroy violently**.

So we should ask: have verses 2-4 ever been fulfilled in the past? No, they haven't.

Here is the essence of what these last three verses tell us:

There is a group of people to whom God refers as **"My outcasts"**. They are **fleeing** from people who seek to violently destroy them. They are compared to a frail bird that has been cast out of its nest, and which bird then looks for a place to hide. Moab is instructed by God to provide **a hiding place** for God's outcasts, and to not uncover them to their persecutors.

This description can readily be identified with Revelation 3:10.

Because you have kept the word of My patience, **I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world**, to try them that dwell upon the earth. (Revelation 3:10)

So Isaiah 16:1-4 implies that the place of safety will be at **"sela in the wilderness"**, which is somewhere in the area of the ancient nation Moab. Now could that be the place today called "Petra". Yes, I suppose that it could. But then, could there be **some other "rocky place" or "stronghold"** in the area of Moab that will be the place of safety? Yes, that is certainly equally possible. The reference to "Moab" seems to restrict the options to the Middle East, and therefore other areas of the world are excluded. But that still leaves plenty of places that could be potential alternatives to the place today called Petra.

So the bottom line is: the place of safety is highly likely to be in the Middle East, somewhere in the territory of ancient Moab. And it is likely to be an arid area. But I don't believe that we can restrict the exact location to the area that was many centuries later given the Greek name "Petra".

Anyway, so much for the cryptic clue that Jesus Christ provided in Matthew 24:28. In Part 3 we'll go back to the account in Matthew 24, and we will look at the rest of Matthew 24, starting with verse 29.

Frank W Nelte