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AN EXAMINATION OF MATTHEW 24:5

Some people have asked me about Matthew 24:5, which reads:

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. (Matthew 24:5 AV)

When we hear explanations for various Bible verses, there is one of at least two different approaches that people can take:

- 1) They can INTERPRET what they believe the text actually means. Such interpretations may very possibly be correct, but we should nevertheless recognize that we are then dealing with "an interpretation" of a biblical text.
- 2) They can EXAMINE THE ORIGINAL TEXT (Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament), and then tell us what the text LITERALLY MEANS, before they then also "interpret" such literal meanings into our context today. Applications of biblical verses by their very nature almost always involve a certain amount of interpretation. It is important that the foundation for any such "interpreting" is sound.

When there are doubts or disagreements about the meaning and application of any Scripture, THEN the second of these two approaches is obviously the better and the safer approach to take. The reason is simple: IT IS ALWAYS BETTER TO START WITH A CORRECT AND FAITHFUL TRANSLATION OF ANY SCRIPTURE BEFORE WE ATTEMPT TO INTERPRET THIS SCRIPTURE INTO OUR CONTEXT TODAY! When there are potential differences in understanding a biblical statement, then we simply cannot base our understanding on some or other English translation without first verifying that we are indeed dealing with a faithful and accurate translation.

The people who contacted me had been told that Mr. Armstrong's explanation of Matthew 24:5 was supposedly in error, and that in this verse Jesus Christ was only speaking about POLITICAL rulers and NOT RELIGIOUS RULERS (i.e. He was not speaking about the false ministers of this world) who would do the deceiving.

So let's start by looking at the Greek text of this verse.

First of all, all the Greek texts (i.e. the Majority Text, the Byzantine Text and the Minority Text) agree 100% on the wording for this verse. So we don't have to worry about "alternate readings" somehow saying something else.

THE GREEK TEXT OF MATTHEW 24:5

Here is the transliterated text for this verse.

"Polloi gar eleusontai epi to onomati mou legontes ego eimi ho Christos kai pollous planesousin"
(Matthew 24:5 Byzantine Text, Majority Text and Minority Text)

Now let's examine every single word in this verse:

- 1) polloi = nominative masculine plural of the adjective "MANY"
- 2) gar = the conjunction meaning "FOR"
- 3) eleusontai = future middle deponent indicative of the verb "TO COME", thus meaning "SHALL COME"
- 4) epi to onomati mou = IN MY NAME
- 5) onomati = dative singular of "NAME"
- 6) epi = a preposition which governs 3 cases: the accusative, the genitive and the dative case.

Its meaning is influenced by the case with which it is used. With the dative case (as we have in this Scripture) the preposition "epi" implies actual superposition, i.e. as one thing resting upon another, as upon a foundation which may be real. "Epi" is commonly rendered into English as "upon, on, in, unto, to". We'll look at this more closely later.
- 7) legontes = present active participle of the verb "lego" meaning "TO SAY" or "to speak"
- 8) ego = first person pronoun meaning "I"
- 9) eimi = first person singular present indicative of the verb meaning "I AM"
- 10) ho Christos = THE CHRIST
- 11) kai = conjunction meaning "AND"
- 12) pollous = accusative masculine plural of the adjective "MANY"
- 13) planesousin = future active indicative of the verb "planao" meaning "TO DECEIVE" and thus "shall deceive".

So now we have looked at every single word in this verse without getting involved in any kind of "interpreting". Each word has been examined for its actual meaning. So now we are in a position to "put it all together". Here is what we have:

1) By using the Greek verb "eimi", which automatically implies the pronoun "I" as in "I AM", this did not require Christ to also use the pronoun "ego". The fact that Christ did use the pronoun "ego" in conjunction with "eimi" tells us that HE WAS EMPHASIZING that these deceivers would "APPEAL TO HIM AS THEIR AUTHORITY". The "ego" is used purely for emphasis. These two words used together (i.e. "ego eimi") make clear that Mr. Armstrong was perfectly correct when he CONSISTENTLY explained to us that the deceivers Jesus Christ was here speaking about would NOT claim that "they themselves" were "the Christ" (which is the way most biblical commentators seem to want to explain this verse); rather they would point to the historical figure of Jesus Christ and say that HE was and is the Christ.

Note carefully:

Had Jesus Christ intended to say that these deceivers would claim that they themselves were "the Christ", THEN He would simply have said "eimi ho Christos", because the "I" pronoun implied in the verb

"eimi" would refer to the one saying those words.

By adding the pronoun "ego" Jesus Christ was referring to HIMSELF and nullifying the pronoun "I" contained in the verb "eimi", which pronoun would have referred to those deceivers saying those words. This double use of the pronoun "I" in the Greek (one stated and one implied in the verb) makes quite clear that Jesus Christ was focussing the attention on Himself as the One who would be the subject of what those deceivers would say.

2) The use of the preposition "epi" with the dative case in the phrase "epi to onomati mou" shows that these people would be resting their case "ON THE FOUNDATION" of the real Jesus Christ, meaning they would APPEAL TO HIS AUTHORITY, but without having been sent or commissioned by Him. They would attempt to rest their case upon a foundation which is real, the foundation of the earthly ministry of the real Jesus Christ ... but they would be appealing to this authority without any kind of right or permission to do so.

3) The statement about such people appealing to the authority of the real Jesus Christ is followed by the conjunction "kai", meaning "AND"! Jesus Christ was thus telling us that their use of HIS name and their appeals to HIS authority would be THE VERY MEANS FOR DECEIVING "MANY"! The conjunction "kai" closely links the statement in the second part of this verse with the statement that preceded it in the first part of this verse. There is a "cause and effect" relationship between the two parts of this verse joined by "and" ... the second part is A CONSEQUENCE to the first part.

And that pretty well gives us the whole picture for this verse.

So Jesus Christ said:

1) Many would come appealing to HIS authority (i.e. to HIS name).

2) He obviously implied that these "many" would NOT have been sent by Him.

3) By appealing to HIS authority, they would obviously be coming IN THE NAME OF RELIGION, and not in the name of politics! The claim that this verse is somehow a reference to politicians is totally unjustified.

4) These "many" would boldly assert that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was indeed "THE CHRIST".

5) This appeal to the authority of the real Jesus Christ would be the very thing that would result in MANY being deceived by such people.

Understand the following:

Jesus Christ was with these words obviously referring to people who would come with a RELIGIOUS message. This understanding requires "no interpreting" on our part. But to claim that this verse somehow refers to POLITICIANS equally obviously requires us TO INTERPRET this statement by Jesus Christ, since politicians aren't really being spoken about here. Such an interpretation is assuredly not based on anything in the Greek text, which we have here examined in detail.

Matthew 24:5 is not a long or difficult verse at all, and it is quite clear to me that what Mr. Armstrong taught us about this verse is perfectly correct.

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