

## A COMPARISON OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate parallel events between the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation in a sequential format. Correlation of each event of the Olivet Discourse with its timing in the Book of Revelation informs our understanding of the current age (in regards to signs of the end times or stage setting), and interpretation of the return of Christ, and the judgment at that time.

### **Sequential and Successive, not Merely Recapitulation**

There is an expanding development of the judgments in the Book of Revelation. In other words, there is a sequential relationship between the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. The series of judgments are not parallel and simultaneous in the sense of recapitulation. Each series of judgments is best interpreted as generally chronological to its antecedent. This means the seventh seal judgment leads specifically into the series of the seven trumpet judgments, and the seventh trumpet judgment leads specifically into the series of the seven bowl judgments.

### **The Beginning of the Tribulation (Olivet Discourse and Revelation)**

There are two differing views among premillennialists as to the timing of prophetic fulfillment of the birth pangs prophesied in the Olivet Discourse. In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Dr. Walvoord referred to premillennial interpreters who understand 24:4-14 “as a unit, describing the general characteristics of the age leading up to the end, while at the same time recognizing that the prediction of the difficulties, which will characterize the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ, are fulfilled in an intensified form as the age moves on to its conclusion.” In other words, 24:4-14 are “general signs” whereas 24:15-26 are “specific signs.” Generally, this would mean “these [general] signs have been at least partially fulfilled in the present age and have characterized the period between the first and second coming of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> However, even within this view, there are some who interpret 24:4-8 as general signs of the period between the first and second coming of Christ; therefore, 24:9-14 would be events concerning the first half of the tribulation.<sup>2</sup>

It is not easy to argue that the birth pangs (false messiahs, wars, famines, and earthquakes) have been lacking in the present age. However, the relation of the disciple’s questions in the Olivet Discourse to parallels in Revelation 6 indicate that these signs

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 183.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1983), 440.

cannot refer to the current church age. Furthermore, these signs are unique to a period of which the world has never known. Since these signs are events which fit contextually with the tribulation period, they should not be cited as fulfilled (in any sense) in the current age.

For example, famines and plagues are offered as proof of fulfillment, but the truth is they have been occurring throughout the course of human history for thousands of years. The worst famines in history occurred in North China (1876-79) and India (1876-1878). In North China alone, “deaths by hunger, violence, and subsequent disease are estimated at between 9 million and 13 million.”<sup>3</sup> The worst case of pestilence was the Plague of Justinian (AD 500-650). The effects of the plague left three of every five inhabitants dead. The decline of the city of Constantinople, and the Byzantine Empire, dates from the Plague of Justinian. Not until the ninth century did the Empire begin to recover. “Recurring epidemics of bubonic plague,” the Black Death, “killed as many as 100 million people.” From 1347-51 “the disease affected every level of society, killing an estimated 75 million people, depopulating more than 200,000 villages, and reducing the European population by perhaps as much as one-quarter” in Western Europe.<sup>4</sup> None can deny the devastation of these select examples, but they will pale in comparison to those of the tribulation. No current frame of reference exists for the judgments and signs of the tribulation. If the events of 24:4-14 (or 24:4-8) are general signs of disasters as ancient as the human race—representing familiarly distressing scenes of conquest, war, famine, and death—then what is different with the breaking of the first four seal judgments? Obviously, nothing would be different.<sup>5</sup>

Another premillennial interpretation of 24:4-14 would understand these prophesied events as occurring solely in the first half of the tribulation. Gaebelien wrote, “The point which we wish to make is the following: If this is the correct interpretation, if Matthew xxiv :4-14 refers to the beginning of that coming end of the age and if Revelation vi refers to the same beginning of the end and that which follows the sixth chapter leads us on into the great tribulation, then there must be a perfect harmony between that part of the Olivet discourse contained in Matthew xxiv and the part of Revelation beginning with the sixth chapter. *And such is indeed the case.*”<sup>6</sup>

### **The First Half of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:4–20)**

In Matthew 24:4-5, 11; Mark 13:5-6, and Luke 21:8, false messiahs and prophets are mentioned; and, in Revelation 6:2, we read of the rider on the white horse. Revelation 6:2 indicates four significant factors of the horseman of the first seal: (1) the color of the

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<sup>3</sup> James C. Cornell Jr., *The Great International Disaster Book* (New York: Pocket Books, 1979), 155.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-84.

<sup>5</sup> Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 132.

<sup>6</sup> Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition*, 2 vols. (New York City: Our Hope, 1910), 2:182.

horse is white; (2) the rider holds a bow; (3) the rider wears a στέφανος; and, (4) the rider's conquering according to the verb νικάω.

As opposed to the horseman of the first seal being identified as Antichrist, it would seem best to understand the first seal referring to false messiahs and prophets.

The second white horse rider consistently has a sword throughout the Book of Revelation (1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21); therefore, such divergence with the first white horse rider results in an obvious distinction.

After giving a warning of *many* false messiahs, Jesus used a future tense (*mellō*) to indicate that at the time of the false messiahs *you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars* (Matt 24:4–6). This appears to be an obvious parallel to Matthew 24:6–7a; Mark 13:7–8a; Luke 21:9–10 where we read about “wars and rumors of wars,” and nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” A false peace and security, along with religious apostasy (the false messiahs inspire their devotees to insurrection and wars), characterize the beginning of the tribulation that will develop into multiple wars near and away from the land of Israel. All this is yet future and parallels John's description of the second seal horseman in Revelation 6:3–4.

The third seal horseman, or black horse rider, brings famine (a foreboding indication of the pale horse rider). The third seal will likely occur shortly after the second seal judgment since famine often follows open warfare.

The fourth seal horseman, the pale horse rider, brings death. This judgment parallels the synoptic Olivet discourses that prophesy famine, pestilences, and death as part of the beginning of birth pangs. Luke simply mentioned famines, whereas John's usage of *thanatos* would include pestilences and death in general.

“For thus says the Lord God, ‘How much more when I send My four sever judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague to cut off man and beast from it!’” (Ezek 14:21). These same four figures are prophesied as God's wrath in several other passages (cf. Lev 26:21–28; Numb 11:33; 16:46; 25:8–11; Deut 11:17; 28:20–26; 32:22–25; Jer 15:1–9; 16:4–11; 19:7–9; Ezek 5:11–17; 6:11–12; 7:3–15). The tribulation commences with the outpouring of God's wrath in the seal judgments, followed by the trumpet judgments, and concluding with the bowl judgments. The judgments are sequential and progressive, which means there is no break in the outpouring of God's wrath, and intensify as they are cast upon the earth.

### *The Birth Pangs*

This is in keeping with the analogy of birth pangs, since such pains do not occur at the beginning of pregnancy, but at the end. In the same manner, the signs of Matthew 24:4–14 do not occur during the current church dispensation, but only during the tribulation immediately before Christ's return. The Olivet Discourse will instruct Israel and Gentile saints, during the tribulation, that the events of verses 5–6 are *not yet the end*. It is just *the beginning of birth pangs* before being able to *straighten up and lift up [their] heads, because [their] redemption is drawing near* (24:8; Luke 21:28).

The Greek word, ὠδίν, may be a technical term, as BAG define it as “of the ‘Messianic woes’, the terrors and torments traditionally viewed as prelude to the coming of the Messianic Age . . . associated with the appearance of the Son of Man at the end of

history, as the *beginning of the (end-time) woes* ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων Mt 24: 8; Mk 13: 8.<sup>7</sup> The birth pangs of the first half of the tribulation are the beginning of the greater birth pangs in the second half of the tribulation. The entire seven-year tribulation is the period of birth pangs, as Jeremiah 30:6-7 indicates, “Ask now, and see if a male can give birth. Why do I see every man, *with* his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And *why* have all faces turned pale? ‘Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s distress, but he will be saved from it.’”

The seven-year tribulation is clearly divided chronologically in the Books of Daniel and Revelation, and characteristically in the eschatological discourses of the synoptics, that is the beginning (less intense experiences) and the more frequent and intense experiences of the tribulation period. Drawing from extra-biblical sources, Raphael Patai devoted an entire chapter to “The Pangs of Time” and concluded,

The pangs of the Messianic times are imagined as heavenly as well as earthly sources and expressions. From Above, awesome cosmic cataclysms will be visited upon the earth. . . . All this will lead to internal decay, demoralization, and even apostasy. Things will come to such a head that people will despair of Redemption. This will last seven years. And then, unexpectedly, the Messiah will come.

Because of this gloomy picture of the beginning of the Messianic era, which by Talmudic times was firmly believed in, some sages expressed the wish not to see the Messiah. . . . In any case, both the people and its religious leaders continued to hope for the coming of the Messiah.<sup>8</sup>

The Jewish understanding of the birth pangs of the Messianic times is certainly consistent with the sequence of the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation. The birth pangs are additional evidence that supports the concept of Matthew 24:4-14 (and the parallels in Markan and Lukan discourses) as indicating events of the first half of the tribulation, which is also parallel to the four horseman of Revelation 6:1-8.

The eschatological discourses of the synoptics warn of persecution and martyrdom during the tribulation (Matt 24:9-10, 12; Mark 13:9, 11-13; Luke 21:11a-19). Mark and Luke stated the comfort given to the faithful during the tribulation is that the Holy Spirit will give them the words to speak. As martyrdom (24:9) is also the fifth seal, John recorded the prayer of those seeking justice from God.

Earthquakes are frequent throughout the Book of Revelation as judgment is about to intensify (Rev 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18). The sixth seal should be correlated around the time of the abomination of desolation at the midpoint of the tribulation.<sup>9</sup> It seems that

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<sup>7</sup> William F. Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich [BAGD], *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 895.

<sup>8</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 95-96.

<sup>9</sup> The reader should note the corollary passages in Daniel 9:26-27; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14-19; Luke 21:23; 23:29-30; cf. Isa 2:12-22; Hos 10:1-8 (Luke speaks in positive terms what Matthew speaks in negative terms; one speaks in terms of woe and the other speaks in terms of blessing). Revelation 6:12-16, as well, correlates the above verses and supports the view that the abomination of desolation occurs around the breaking of the sixth seal. This interpretation would also regard the judgments as sequential (e.g., the seventh seal is the seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet is the seven bowls).

the sixth seal is used to introduce the *great tribulation* (24:21), or the second half of the tribulation which begins with the abomination of desolation.

### *The Seal Judgments*

Both Rosenthal and Van Kampen gave attention to the similarities between the events of Matthew 24:5-9 and the first five seals of the Apocalypse (Rev 6:1-8). However, their argument is that the first five seals (6:1-11) are not the wrath of God, but that of man through the Antichrist (similar to midtribulationists).<sup>10</sup>

Both Rosenthal<sup>11</sup> and Van Kampen<sup>12</sup> argued that God's wrath does not begin until after the sixth seal. After the cosmic signs of Revelation 6:12-14, verses 15-17 provide the reaction of *the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man*. They will cry to *the mountains and to the rocks*, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?" A plain reading of Scripture here should cause one to conclude that *the great day* of God's wrath has already come and is present during the sixth seal.

Since pre-wrath rapturists do not believe God's wrath begins until the seventh seal, they must argue, "the aorist tense is, generally speaking, timeless."<sup>13</sup> Rosenthal wrote, ". . . the phrase, 'the great day of his wrath is come' refers, not to a past event, but to an event about to occur, and that in concert with the opening of the seventh seal."<sup>14</sup> Following the sixth seal, God's wrath "is an event that is on the threshold of happening—a future event soon to occur."<sup>15</sup> The aorist, ἦλθεν, in 6:17 is in the indicative mood which would confirm the reality of the action (God's wrath) from the standpoint of the world leaders.

The aorist is not timeless as the pre-wrath view requires; rather, the time of action is past. Non-indicative moods may indicate the kind of action as opposed to the time of action. Dana and Mantey stated, "It has no essential temporal significance, its time relations being found only in the indicative, where it is used as past and hence augmented. . . . The aorist signifies nothing as to completeness, but simply presents the action as attained. It states the *fact* of the action or event without regard to its *duration*."<sup>16</sup> Robertson concurred, "It is true that in the expression of past time in the indicative and with all the other moods, the aorist is the tense used as a matter of course. . . ."<sup>17</sup> Wallace acquiesced, "In the *indicative*, the aorist usually indicates *past* time with reference to the time of speaking (thus, 'absolute time'). . . . Outside the indicative and participle, time is not a feature of the aorist."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Marvin J. Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 147-51; Robert D. Van Kampen, *The Rapture Question Answered* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1997), 139-52.

<sup>11</sup> Rosenthal, *Pre-Wrath Rapture*, 167.

<sup>12</sup> Van Kampen, *Rapture Question*, 164.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>14</sup> Rosenthal, *Pre-Wrath Rapture*, 167.

<sup>15</sup> Van Kampen, *Rapture Question*, 154.

<sup>16</sup> H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 193.

<sup>17</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 831.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 555.

## “This Generation” and Time Texts

*Matthew 24:34, 36 (cf. Rev)*

Preterists claim to place primary emphasis upon the demonstrative pronouns in verses 34 and 36 of Matthew 24, but only a futurist interpretation seeks to understand those pronouns within the context. Demonstrative pronouns help locate and identify nouns or other pronouns. Pronouns substitute nouns when the nouns they replace can be understood from the context. They also indicate whether they are replacing a singular or plural tense and identify in what location (near/far) the speaker places himself in relation to the object.

### English Demonstrative Pronouns

| Pronoun | Tense    | Location |
|---------|----------|----------|
| this    | singular | near     |
| that    | singular | far      |
| these   | plural   | near     |
| those   | plural   | far      |

In Greek, there are two demonstrative pronouns. Frequently, these demonstratives will be used independent of a noun and carry the intensity of a substantive. The most common use of the demonstrative pronoun is with a noun and carrying the strength of an adjective. In other words, the noun will contain the article and the demonstrative pronoun can be found in the predicate position but never in the attributive position (e.g., ὁ υἱὸς οὗτος or οὗτος ὁ υἱός).

### Greek Demonstrative Pronouns

| Pronoun | Tense    | Location |
|---------|----------|----------|
| οὗτος   | singular | near     |
| οὗτοι   | plural   | near     |
| ἐκεῖνος | singular | far      |
| ἐκεῖναι | plural   | far      |

The purpose of demonstrative pronouns in both English and Greek grammar is to help identify where the speaker places himself in relation to the object. Central to preterist eschatology is a first century fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse. The preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse requires Jesus to place Himself in a relatively near relation to the events of Matthew 24—25. If this is the scenario, as the preterists contend, then Jesus would use οὗτος and οὗτοι in order to indicate relatively near events.

In four verses, Jesus used the relatively distant demonstrative pronouns: ἐκεῖναις ταῖς ἡμέραις (24:19); αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκεῖναι (24:22); τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκεῖνων (24:29); and, τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκεῖνης (24:36).<sup>19</sup> When speaking of His coming, Jesus used the relatively

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps a fifth reference could be added in 24:38 (ταῖς ἡμέραις [ἐκεῖναις]) due to the likelihood that the pronoun was omitted accidentally. Both the UBS and Nestle-Aland include ἐκεῖναις in

distant demonstrative pronouns. When Jesus spoke of the events that will occur prior to His coming, He used the relatively near demonstrative pronouns since this would fit His perspective at the time of His coming: ταῦτα (24:8) and οὕτως (24:33). In other words, Jesus was speaking of His future coming, and then used the near demonstratives to describe the eschatological events that will precede His future coming.

When Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, this [αὕτη] generation will not pass away until all these [ταῦτα] things take place” (24:34), He was referring to the same generation that belong in the distance (eschatologically). By identifying the demonstrative pronouns, it becomes clear that Jesus was referring to the generation that witnesses the events of the Olivet Discourse with His coming in a future time. If Jesus intended to speak of a first century fulfillment then He would have used the relatively future demonstrative, ἐκεῖνα, for the events that would occur among the generation that would witness His coming. In other words, Jesus was not using relatively far demonstratives to describe what He prophesied of Himself in relatively near demonstratives, as He stepped into the future from His present earthly location. Only the generation witnessing all the events prophesied in the Olivet Discourse will be the generation to witness His return. Commenting on the parallel passage to Matthew 24 in Luke 21, Lukan scholar Darrell Bock assented:

What Jesus is saying is that the generation that sees the beginning of the end, also sees its end. When the signs come, they will proceed quickly; they will not drag on for many generations.

Nonetheless, in the discourse’s prophetic context, the remark comes after making comments about the nearness of the end to certain signs. As such it is the issue of the signs that controls the passage’s force, making this view likely. If this view is correct, Jesus says that when the signs of the beginning of the end come, then the end will come relatively quickly, within a generation.<sup>20</sup>

Preterists insist that they are defending the Bible against attacks from liberals such as Bertrand Russell<sup>21</sup> by claiming a first century fulfillment of Matthew 24. Because, in their view, the Olivet Discourse and Revelation refer to the same time period, preterists use the words *shortly* and *near* in Revelation 1:1, 3 to date the events of Matthew 24 and Revelation prior to A.D. 70.

Preterists simply are not exegeting the texts as they claim to be doing. BAGD defines the adverb *tachos* as follows: “speed, quickness, swiftness, haste.”<sup>22</sup> The Apostle John uses the adverb *tachus* with *erchomai* (“to come”) in Revelation 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20 meaning “quick, swift, speedy.”<sup>23</sup> All six uses of *tachus* in Revelation mean “without delay, quickly, at once.”<sup>24</sup> Blass-Debrunner concurred by

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brackets. Metzger rated its inclusion with a “C” grade. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 52.

<sup>20</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1691-92.

<sup>21</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 13, 56.

<sup>22</sup> BAGD, 807.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

classifying *tachus* as “an adverb of manner,” not “an adverb of time.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the text in Matthew 24:34 (and Revelation 1:1, 3) describes the manner in which tribulational events will occur, and not their timing.

Although Matthew 24:34 is the preterist mantra, the reference here to *this generation* is a difficult passage to correlate with the preterist system. Preterists seek to demonstrate that whenever *this generation* is used in the Gospels, it refers to the first century generation. Additionally, Christ was speaking to the disciples prior to His crucifixion. In Matthew 23:36, *this generation* refers to those who would witness the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Dispensationalists should agree with the last statements, but disagree with the first statement.

Dispensationalists generally interpret *this generation* to speak of those who will not only witness *all these things* of Matthew 24 (Luke 21:32 reads, *all things*), which includes the literal and physical return of Jesus Christ. It seems the best way to understand γένηται is as an ingressive aorist, which means an event has occurred but the emphasis is on initiation. The destruction of the Temple should be understood from its initiation, which would bear the meaning “begin to take place.” The prophetic chronology for *all these things* of Matthew 24:34 would begin with the first century generation, but not find final fulfillment until the second coming.

### **The Judgment of Gentiles (Matthew 24:36–25:46)**

#### *The One Taken and The Other Left (24:36-41)*

In Matthew 24:36, Jesus said, “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.*” In 24:36-41, Jesus will provide answers as to what the conditions will be like when He does return. “*For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah (24:37).*” In the same way, unbelievers did not believe judgment would be coming upon them in the days of Noah, so will the response of the unbelievers be during the tribulation even though they will experience the wrath of God. *One will be taken, and one will be left (24:39b).* The unbelievers do not truly believe judgment is coming.

In keeping with the context of tribulational events, the *one taken* and the *other left* in Matthew 24:37–41 is a reference to the separation that will take place when Christ returns to earth. Israel is not included here since her judgment is the tribulation. The *one taken* is in judgment in death at the second coming and the *other left* enters into the millennial kingdom. The response of Jesus to the disciples’ questioning (Luke 17:37; cf. Rev 19:17–18) accurately fits this interpretation alone. In other words, the disciples question when the restoration of Israel will take place and God will judge all her enemies. Jesus has already answered questions in regards to Israel and is now dealing with the judgment of Gentiles.

The Olivet Discourse deals with Christ returning to the earth in judgment before establishing the messianic kingdom. The emphasis does not have to do with the

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<sup>25</sup> Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 55–57.

unexpectedness of the time of the Rapture; rather the focus is on unexpected judgment *just like the days of Noah* (Matt 24:37).<sup>26</sup>

The wide-ranging progression of events (*times and seasons*), leading to the day of the Lord, *will come like a thief* for the unbeliever (cf. 2 Pet 3:3-10). In contrast, the day of the Lord does not overtake the church. *For God has not destined us* [the Christian] *for wrath* [the day of the Lord], *but for obtaining salvation* [deliverance] *through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we are awake* [the watchful Christian] *or asleep* [the unwatchful Christian], *we may live together with Him* (1 Thess 5:2, 9; cf. 1:10).

*The coming of the Son of man* in Matthew 24:3, 27, 30, 37, 39, 42, and 44 refers to Christ's return to execute judgment and establish His kingdom on earth. The messianic title *Son of Man* never refers to the church; it is a title for the Davidic King who will reign on earth from Jerusalem (Dan 7:13–14). Emphasis then lies upon the signs of approximation preceding *the coming of the Son of Man* and the *parable from the fig tree* is given (24:30, 32). When a future generation witnesses all the signs of Matthew 24, then *the coming of the Son of Man* is approaching, *right at the door* (24:33).

If there is still any doubt that this coming is for judgment, Luke 17:34–37 must be read for it answers as to what place *one will be taken and the other will be left*. Jesus responds, *Where the body is, there also will the vultures be gathered*. In other words, God takes them in death and feeds their carcasses to the vultures. Matthew 24:28 indicates the timing of this event will be after *the coming of the Son of Man* (cf. Rev 19:17–19). At the second coming, some unbelievers are taken in judgment and put to death, thereby beginning the process that Matthew 25 reveals will be the destiny of all goats before the establishment of the millennial kingdom.

#### *The Parable of the Householder (24:42-51)*

The parable of the householder (cf. Luke 12:41-48) contrasts the eternal destinies of *the faithful and sensible slave* and the *evil slave* when Christ returns to earth at the end of the tribulation. One position is that “the Greek text makes it plain that only one servant, not two, is in view.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, an individual begins as a *faithful and sensible slave*, but then becomes an unfaithful, *evil slave*. According to such a view, the remote Greek demonstrative, ἐκεῖνος, in verse 48 proves the same slave is in view. The slave started well, but did not finish well. Nevertheless, the slave was saved and is still saved even though he is unfaithful and will lose rewards.

The problem with this position (whether the slave is understood as only one servant that wavers in faith, or two slaves—one faithful and one unfaithful—that are saved) is that all of the parables in the Olivet Discourse contrast at least two individuals with the same social background. The use of *slaves* (24:46, 48, 50; 25:21, 23, 26, 30) is an effective means of illustrating the sovereignty of God over all humanity. Some will believe and some will not believe in Messiah, and the parables reveal the destiny of both.

<sup>26</sup> Edersheim, *Jesus the Messiah*, 786, writes, “To the world this would indeed become the occasion for utter carelessness and practical disbelief of the coming judgment (vv. 37–40). As in the days of Noah the long delay of threatened judgment had led to absorption in the ordinary engagements of life, to the entire disbelief of what Noah had preached, so would it be in the future. But that day would come certainly and unexpectedly, to the sudden separation of those who were engaged in the same daily business of life. . . .”

<sup>27</sup> Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992), 387.

The parable does not concern a slave who was faithful and later became unfaithful. The phrase, *if that evil slave*, does not refer to a hypothetical situation either. The point of the parable is the *faithful and sensible slave* will be rewarded when Messiah returns, in contrast to *that evil slave* whose Master *shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites* (24:51). The evil character of the unbelieving slave is evident in his character which causes him to deceive himself into thinking the Messiah is not returning or that he will have time before Messiah returns to become ready.

The language *cut him in pieces* and *weeping . . . and the gnashing of teeth* has been interpreted as “Oriental symbolism for profound regret” and “the former is a metaphor for judgment.”<sup>28</sup> BAGD defined βούχω as “a sign of violent rage”<sup>29</sup> which could indicate suffering and remorse. However, the noun βουγμός always indicates the eternity state of the wicked. Thayer defines βούχω as “to grind, gnash, with the teeth” but defines βουγμός τῶν ὀδόντων in 24:51 as “a phrase denoting the extreme anguish and utter despair of men consigned to eternal condemnation.”<sup>30</sup>

The parable of the householder also deals with the subject of the judgment of Gentiles. Since God saves all Israel before the second coming, and these judgments occur at the second coming, they cannot be a reference to Israel. Indeed, Jesus will not return until the nation of Israel repents and acknowledges Him as Messiah (Lev 26:40–42; Jer 3:16–17; Hos 5:15–6:3; Zech 12–14; Matt 23:39). It is only when Israel cries out for the Messiah that He will return. *They will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him* (Zech 12:10). The judgments of Matthew 24:36–25:46 at the second coming would not pertain to Israel. Since the church has been raptured before this period, and the Olivet Discourse is dealing with tribulational events, then the judgments must be referring to the response of Gentiles in the tribulation to the Messiah before His return.

### *The Parable of the Ten Virgins (25:1-13)*

Matthew 25 begins with the parable of the ten virgins. The background of the parable of the virgins is the Middle Eastern marriage custom. The marriage contract would come into being while the couple was quite young and unable to make adult decisions. Nevertheless, at this time, the couple was considered legally married. After an unspecified period passed and the couple had matured, the bridegroom would journey to the house of the bride, and take her to his home. The bride and groom would then proceed to the marriage supper, along with all the guests (cf. 22:1–14), at the house of the bridegroom. The wise virgins are those who were longing for the wedding feast at the house of the bridegroom. The marriage supper of the Lamb will take place on earth in the millennial kingdom (Rev 19:7–10).<sup>31</sup>

The marriage supper imagery is a familiar reference to a Jewish person concerning the Messianic kingdom and the bride, Israel. The context negates any

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> BAGD, 148.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1885; rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 106.

<sup>31</sup> George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952), 3:301. The wedding at Cana in Galilee (John 2:1–12) depicts the Jewish custom of marriage.

connection with the βήμα or the *mystery* . . . *speaking with reference to Christ and the church*. The Olivet Discourse does not even address the church or the issue of the rapture, the parable here is treating judgment at the second coming. The five *foolish* virgins *were invited but not worthy* (Matt 22:8) and will be sent *into the outer darkness* (22:13). One interpretation is to regard the *man not dressed in wedding clothes* is a saved man and “he was apparently not only in the kingdom but actually at the wedding banquet himself.”<sup>32</sup> He is merely “outside the relative light of the banquet hall.”<sup>33</sup>

Such a view is based upon interpreting ἐξώτερος (8:12; 22:13; 25:30) as “the darkness outside.”<sup>34</sup> Since the basic meaning of ἐξώτερος is “outside” it can be translated “the darkness outside.” However, the question is whether “outside” refers to exclusion from the millennial marriage feast or complete exclusion (due to lack of justification) from the millennial kingdom.

The superlative ἐξώτερος (“outer,” “exterior,” or “external”) is closely related to the adverb ἔξω which is often translated “without” or “out of doors.” The adverb ἔξω is used more than a few times (1 Cor 5:12-13; Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:12; Rev 22:15) to describe the eternal destiny of the lost (“those who are without”).<sup>35</sup> It is never used to describe the eternal destiny of the saved. Indeed, Jesus uses it, promising, “*All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not ἐκβάλω ἔξω* (John 6:37).

Some contend that the man in Matthew 22:13 is saved and therefore allowed into the wedding hall, but excluded from the marriage feast. If this interpretation is accepted, then consistency must be maintained in 25:10 and the *foolish* virgins are saved.<sup>36</sup> Matthew, however, said *the door was shut* hence they were not allowed into the wedding hall. Furthermore, Jesus *answered and said*, “*Truly I say to you, I do not know you*” (25:12; cf. 7:21-23). Once *the door was shut* it was too late to enter, therefore, “*Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour* (25:13). Those who are outside do not just miss an extravagant meal; they are completely outside the kingdom permanently.

Since the parable begins with the phrase, ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (25:1), it is not addressing “eternal reward” but “eternal salvation.” Matthew used the phrase thirty-two times (3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:9; 11:11, 12; 13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 16:19; 18:1, 3, 4, 23; 19:12, 14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1, 14) and when he used it in other parables outside the Olivet Discourse, they are always treating the issue of eternal salvation.

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<sup>32</sup> Dillow, *Servant Kings*, 347.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 197.

<sup>36</sup> Dillow recognizes this difficulty in *Servant Kings*, 396.