

# Consistent Pretribulationism and Jewish Questions of the End

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## Introduction

Regardless of the prophetic system, Matthew 24-25 is a key text for arguing one's position. The key to understanding the Olivet Discourse is to interpret consistently throughout Matthew 24-25 paying attention to the context and the Jewish understanding of "the end of the age."

## Interpretative Issues

*Preterism.* The preterist view of the Olivet Discourse is that most, if not all, of the prophecy has already been fulfilled.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A significant argument in regards to preterism has to do with the dating of the Book of Revelation. Whereas the majority of Bible scholars date Revelation during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD), the preterist dates Revelation during the reign of Nero (54-68 AD). Generally speaking, preterism offers five basic arguments for an early dating of the Book of Revelation. First, descriptions of the antichrist are related to the reign of Nero as emperor (e.g. Rev. 6:2; 13:1-18; 17:1-13) [Assuming his conclusion before proving it, David Chilton writes, "As we will see throughout the commentary, the Book of Revelation is primarily a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This fact alone places St. John's authorship somewhere before September of A.D. 70. Further, as we shall see, St. John speaks of Nero Caesar as still on the throne—and Nero died in June 68." David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), 4]. Second, the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 deals with Jewish persecution of Christians that would result in the destruction of Jerusalem. Third, the Apostle's intimate knowledge of the Temple in Revelation 11 indicates that it was still in existence when the Book of Revelation was written. Fourth, the testimony of Irenaeus is "somewhat ambiguous; and regardless of what he was talking about, he could have been mistaken." Lastly, the canon of Scripture is connected with the destruction of Jerusalem and would have been closed in 70 AD (e.g. Dan. 9:24-27). Therefore, the major prophetic events in the New Testament were fulfilled at that time. The preterist viewpoint believes that the Titus and the Roman armies fulfilled these

J. Marcellus Kik, a preterist postmillennialist, believes verse 34 is the key to understanding Matthew 24.

We might term this key verse the “time text” of the Chapter. If the literal and well-defined meaning of this verse be accepted, then we shall quite readily perceive that the verse divides the entire Chapter into two main sections. Section One speaks of events which were to befall the contemporary generation of Jesus. Section Two relates to events that are to occur at the second coming of the Lord. Verse 34 thus is the division point of the two sections.<sup>2</sup>

*Historicism.* The historicist view regards the fulfillment of prophetic events as occurring throughout the age of the church. Historicism equates the current church age with the Tribulation based on the day age theory. Literal numbers like 2,300 days (Dan. 8:14) and 1,290 days (Dan. 12:11) are interpreted as years. Historicists view Bible prophecy as continually being fulfilled in the present age. The minority view among historicists is that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD agrees with the breaking of the seals of Revelation.<sup>3</sup> The majority view is that the breaking of the first seal agrees with the death of Domitian in 96 AD. The other six seals are associated with the rise and fall of the Western Roman Empire, which would include the invasion by the German barbarians (Ostrogoths, Visigoths, and Vandals) around the middle of the fifth century.<sup>4</sup>

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major prophetic events, such as the Olivet Discourse and Book of Revelation, when they destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.

<sup>2</sup> J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 60.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary on The New Testament, Volume 5: Matthew through Luke* (Albany: AGES Software), 451-472; Clarke, *Volume 8: 1 Thessalonians through Revelation*, 1083-1089; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Albany: AGES Software), 81-83, 719-721.

<sup>4</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*; E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ* (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1847).

*Idealism.* The idealist (spiritual) view teaches that the prophetic events of Matthew 24-25 are timeless. In other words, there is no single historical fulfillment. The Olivet Discourse is applicable to believers in any age and history is almost completely separate from its fulfillment. Bible prophecy sets forth great principles that are common throughout the age of the world.<sup>5</sup>

*Futurism.* Futurists believe that Bible prophecy will be fulfilled in an eschatological period. If they are consistent in regards to Bible prophecy, dispensationalists should never fluctuate between shades of historicism and futurism. Some futurists do interpret current events as fulfilling prophecy, but when they do so they are being inconsistent in their interpretation of Scripture. Futurism teaches that the tribulation, second coming, and millennium are all future events as they pertain to the nation of Israel. The only prophetic event for the church in the future is the rapture which is imminent.

### **Issues Involving the Rapture**

*The Nature of the Tribulation.* Depending on the context, the word tribulation (θλιψις) can have a variety of meanings. First, it can refer to “tribulation” or “trouble” generally (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; 12:12). Second, it can refer to the seven years of Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Jeremiah 30:7-9; Daniel 9:24-27; 12:1). Lastly, it can refer to the second half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week, the *great tribulation* (Matthew 24:21) as opposed to the first half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week, the *beginning of sorrows* (24:8).

The period of the tribulation does not relate to God’s purpose for the church. The tribulation will come upon a world that

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Alford, “Matthew ,” in *The Greek New Testament*, rev. Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958).

is rebellion to God (Revelation 15:1; 16:1-21; 19:15). It will reveal the nature of Satan (12:7-12). During the tribulation, the nation of Israel will be brought to repentance and faith in the Messiah in preparation for the millennium (Jeremiah 30:7-9; Zechariah 12:9-14:5; Revelation 19:1-6). The tribulation will also be a time of mass evangelism (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 6:9-11; 7:1-17; 11:2-14; 12:13-17; 13:7; 14:1-5, 12-13).

*The Prophetic Timeclock.* The next prophetic event on God's timeclock is the rapture of the church. The doctrine of the rapture is taught most clearly in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. At the rapture, living Christians will be *harpazo* ("caught up" or "to take with force") in the air to meet Jesus Christ. The raptured saints will be reunited with those who previously died in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). Both will receive their glorified bodies and will be taken to the Father's house (John 14:1-3).

Although the English word *rapture* is not found in the Bible, the teaching of the rapture is clearly found in the Bible. The reason for the English term not being in the Bible is due to the fact that it is derived from the Latin *rapere* (the derivative of the English). Therefore, it is a theological term that utilizes Latin language to describe a biblical doctrine. It was in the fifth century that Jerome translated the Greek word *harpazo* into the Latin as *rapere*. As it is used in the Greek New Testament, the rapture is a "snatching or catching away." At the rapture, Jesus will come in the clouds for His saints; at the second coming, Jesus will come to the earth with His saints to establish the millennial kingdom.

It is logical that the rapture was not revealed in the Old Testament since the rapture involves the church. The church was a mystery in the Old Testament which began on the Day of Pentecost. Christ first gave the promise of the rapture in the New Testament. However, the Old Testament promised the coming of Messiah to earth as the sovereign King.

| <b>Prophetic Emphasis in the Bible</b> |                  |
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| Old Testament                          | Millennial Reign |
| Gospels                                | Second Coming    |
| Epistles                               | Rapture          |
| Revelation                             | Tribulation      |

It is the epistles that primarily emphasize the rapture of the church whereas the Gospels emphasize the second coming of Christ. The reason for the emphasis in the epistles is due to the fact that each is written to churches. The reason for the emphasis upon the second coming in the Gospels is due to the fact that Christ is speaking to His disciples as representatives of the Jewish nation. Their expectation would have been upon the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of Messiah reigning upon David's throne in Jerusalem. Therefore, it is logical to expect that the emphasis in the Gospels would be upon the coming of Christ to the nation of Israel in order to fulfill the covenantal promises and establish His kingdom on earth. Furthermore, since the Olivet Discourse is found in the Gospels then it would be logical that passages such as Matthew 24:37-44, Mark 13:32-37, and Luke 17:26-37 are not referring to the rapture; rather, they are dealing with the second coming of Christ.

### **The Hermeneutical Context**

Real estate agents will give three key factors in selling a home: location, location, and location. Similarly, three key factors in understanding a passage of Scripture include: context, context, and context. The three aspects of context involve the following: the author's context, the far context, and the near context.

The author's context would include the theme of the whole book, that is, whom did the author write to and for what purpose. The far context would involve the paragraphs within the chapter

in relation to the isolated passage. The near context involves the surrounding verses immediately before and after a passage of Scripture. The specific dispensation to whom a passage is directed and the historical-cultural environment at the time of writing must be considered by the student of the Word (this will also include the unified message of God throughout the entire Bible).

### *The Author's Context*

Matthew's Gospel gives the fullest teaching on the Olivet Discourse (parallel passages would include Mark 13; Luke 17:20-37; 21:20-37). It is for this reason that more attention will be given to his record of the Olivet Discourse. Through even a cursory reading of Matthew's Gospel, it becomes clear that the author's specific theme is that Jesus is the Messiah—The King of the Jews. Matthew's intent is to demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth is, indeed, the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.

Jesus is portrayed not only as the Messiah in Matthew's Gospel, but also as the royal King. Matthew elucidates his theme by linking Jesus with both Abraham (1:2) and David (1:6). Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus to prove that He is indeed of the royal and Kingly line. This historical material proves Jesus' right to the Davidic throne. The repeated theme is emphasized that Jesus is "King of the Jews" and an authoritative Teacher (2:2; 7:28, 29; 21:5); therefore, He will commission the disciples to reach "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6) and finally, He gives authority to His disciples to go to all the nations sharing the *εὐαγγέλιον*. The material also introduces the ethical and spiritual principles of the Messianic kingdom proving that it has a present spiritual existence as well as an eschatological material manifestation. Before this kingdom is inaugurated, judgment must come first.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew will also seek to prove the importance of Gentiles in relation to the kingdom (i.e. 1:3, 5, 6; 10; 15).

Therefore, Matthew's primary purpose for writing is to prove that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah. However, this point alone is not the only purpose of the book. Matthew also writes to inform his readers of God's kingdom program. Matthew will answer the question as to why Jesus the Messiah did not bring in the prophesied kingdom of God at His first coming. It will be clear that Israel's rejection of their Messiah postponed the kingdom, but this does not mean the promises to national Israel are canceled.

Matthew is seeking to prove that Jesus is the Messiah even though He did not institute the prophesied kingdom of the Old Testament at His first coming. Matthew will record more information about the kingdom than any of the other gospels. Jesus' Messianic claims will be authenticated by His miracles and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Having set forth Christ's credentials, Matthew will seek to prove that Israel's rejection of her King is the reason for the postponement of the kingdom.

#### *The Far Context*

According to Matthew 21:17-22, Jesus sees a fig tree with leaves on it but He does not find any fruit on it. A fig tree will bear its fruit before its leaves come forth. This tree had put forth leaves, but no fruit. The fact that Jesus went to the tree to pick the fruit does not imply that He did not know it was bare. Rather Jesus chose to illustrate a parable by the act of searching the tree for fruit.<sup>7</sup>

Immediately, Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered. The cursing of the tree for lack of fruit symbolized the unfruitfulness of Jerusalem. Though she had a pretense of godliness, Jerusalem's inhabitants were utterly fruitless. *"No Longer shall there*

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<sup>7</sup> H. A. Ironside, *Matthew* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1994), 158.

*ever by any fruit from you*” (Matthew 21:19). The sentence Jesus executed was upon that fruitless generation that would soon witness the judgment to fall upon Jerusalem.

Noting the disciples’ amazement at the withered fig tree, Jesus took the opportunity to impress upon them the primacy of faith. Jerusalem had a form of godliness, but was lacking in faith. It was the unbelief of that faithless generation that would cause it to wither away. In contrast, Christ urges His disciples to be faithful that *“all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive”* (21:22).

Jesus was impressing upon the mind of the disciples that they should not have been amazed at the withered fig tree. If they truly believed and prayed they could say unto a mountain, *“Be taken up and cast into the sea.”* It should be noted that this does not mean one can pray for anything and receive it. Faith in God that is in accordance with His will results in answered prayer. The emphasis is on believing, which is often missing in the prayer.

The account given in Matthew 22:1-14 of a marriage dinner is interpreted by some to refer to the marriage supper of the Lamb. The reason given is that Israel is pictured as waiting for Messiah to come to the earth with the church in order for the marriage dinner to take place. Some prophetic students take the 75-day interval from the second coming of Christ to the start of the millennium (Daniel 12:11-12) to be the timing of the feast. However, according to Jesus’ own words in Luke 22:18 (*“For I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes”*) would indicate that the actual timing of the marriage supper of the Lamb will take place during the millennium.

While the following interpretation is possible, it does not provide the best understanding of the passage under consideration. The first indication that this is not a future historic event is



indicated in Matthew 22:2, *The kingdom of heaven **may be compared** to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son* (emphasis added). Jesus is revealing truth under the symbolism of the parable of the marriage dinner.<sup>8</sup>

The king invites guests to his son's marriage dinner, but none of the guests come. The king sends forth his servants a second time, but the guests are preoccupied with their own interests and are unwilling to come. Some of the invited guests treat the king's servants roughly and even kill them. When the king receives word of this, he sends forth his armies to destroy the murderers, and to burn their city (22:3-7).

The king declares the previous guests as unworthy, and now tells his servants to invite anyone to come. The willing guests were very likely happy to be invited to such a remarkable feast, and the king, in turn, was happy to have them there to celebrate his son's marriage (22:8-10).

The mood now changes as the king notices a man without a wedding garment. The king had provided suitable clothing, but this guest cared not about violating the king's requirements to enter the feast. The guest is speechless when the king confronts him. His servants are told to bind the man hand and foot and then cast him out where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (22:11-13).

The judgment upon the man without a wedding garment may seem harsh at first until one considers the lesson of the parable. *Many are called, but few are chosen* (22:14) because they fail to accept Christ as their righteousness. Just as this man was rejected for not having the king's provision, so will many stand before the Father without the righteousness of Christ to clothe

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<sup>8</sup> Leon J. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1973), 52.

their sinfulness. Israel's rejection brought about judgment upon them which resulted in the Gentiles being invited to the wedding feast. Those who would normally have hesitation about entering the house of a stranger were treated with great hospitality to accept the invitation (Luke 14:23).

The King had presented Himself to the nation, and the religious leaders of the nation had rejected Him. Therefore, the King announces judgment on the nation. Seven woes are pronounced upon the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). These woes are in contrast to the "blessed" in the beatitudes. These woes are the most stinging condemnation of the religious leaders. Jesus refers to *the scribes and the Pharisees* as hypocrites seven times (23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, and 29). He calls them *blind guides* five times (23:16-17, 19, 24, 26), *fools* twice (23:17, 19), *whitewashed tombs* (23:27), *serpents* and a *brood of vipers* (23:33), and in danger of *the sentence of hell* (23:33). The Pharisees and scribes had an outward form of godliness, but were corrupt inside. By their actions these religious leaders demonstrated the very opposite of what true righteousness entailed. It is important to note that the Jewish people are not excluded from following these blind guides. The nation, as well as the religious leaders, is under God's condemnation.

#### *The Near Context*

Christ's lament over Jerusalem is due to the rejection of the prophets that God had sent to the nation. It is for all these reasons that He declares His rejection of that generation (23:36). The unrelenting attempt to find the fulfillment of Bible prophecy in the alleged rejection of Israel is the drive behind preterism. In the preterist view, proof of their claims is set forth in the destruction of Jerusalem. The church is now the means through which millennial blessings will flow. Since this view is currently the most vocal in regards to the Olivet Discourse, it will be pertinent to make some brief remarks about this aberrant theological system. Citing Matthew 23:36, Kenneth Gentry comments,

It seems totally clear that He is speaking to the religious rule of that day, to the religious center of Israel, to the culture of His time, and He is pointing out sin in them. And He says, “Woe unto you.” Why? Because these great tribulational things will be coming upon them: those who betrayed Him, those who had Him crucified, and those who persecute Jesus’ followers from city to city—the first century Jews here being confronted in their leadership. It is important to recognize that “that generation” was objectively the most wicked generation of history for “that generation” committed the worst crime and the worst sin of universal history. It crucified the Son of the living God by rejecting Him though He did many wonderful deeds in their presence.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, Matthew 23:36 does indicate the imminence of judgment upon the nations as well as the religious leaders for all their violence against the prophets. As a result, the generation will be rejected in regards to the King establishing His kingdom among them (23:37-39). However, this rejection is not permanent as the “until” in Matthew 23:39. Christ will establish the prophesied kingdom when the nation repents. In fact, one of the purposes of the tribulation is to bring Israel into a state of repentance whereby they recognize that Jesus is Messiah. It is at the end of the tribulation period, that all living Jews will acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and Romans 11:25-27 will be fulfilled when “all Israel shall be saved.”

Kenneth Gentry then attempts to connect the indictment upon the nation in Matthew 23 with the phrase “this generation” in Matthew 24:34. This is taken to mean that the prophesied

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<sup>9</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “Postmillennialism and Preterism: Great Tribulation is Past,” audiotape (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Foundation, n.d.).

events in the Olivet Discourse have already been fulfilled. J. Marcellus Kik indicates the same reasoning.

Since, then, the obvious sense of the word *generation* must be taken, then the obvious sense of the sentence in which it appears must also be taken, which is, that all the things which Christ mentioned previously occurred before the passing away of the generation living at the time when Jesus spoke. And this would mean that it has found fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70.<sup>10</sup>

The generation of Jesus' day is being left with her house desolate as the Messiah indicates His judgment upon the Temple (23:38; 24:2; cf. 5:35; 17:25, 26; 21:12-16). The disciples' response to Christ's lament is *to point out the temple buildings to Him* (24:1). The questioning of the disciples in Matthew 24:3 is in response to this judgment. Jesus answers by warning the disciples against "false Christs" saying that the end has come. In contrast, Jesus states that when they hear of many claiming to be the Messiah and see "wars and rumours of wars" that "the end is not yet" (24:4-6). Matthew 24:7-14 indicates why the false messiahs and wars do not indicate the end time. It is only when the cataclysmic events and preaching of the gospel of the kingdom occur together that the end shall come (24:14).

The preterist interpretation of the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15 has even been connected with the Roman banners with eagles on them, which represented their gods, and the offering of sacrifice to those gods after the destruction of Jerusalem. The "vultures" in Matthew 24:28 are also interpreted as "eagles." According to preterism, Jesus was prophesying of these eagle banners as symbolic of the Roman soldiers. There-

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<sup>10</sup> J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 31.

fore, the return of Christ is symbolic of the Roman armies coming in judgment.

Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus told the religious leaders that they would *see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven* (26:64). Preterism interprets this to mean that when judgment took place in Jerusalem, the religious leaders would “see” Jesus intuitively. In other words, they would understand that the destruction of Jerusalem was Jesus coming in judgment. The “end of the age” then is the Jewish age so that now the kingdom relates to the church age. The last days ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. The return of Jesus was in judgment rather than a physical return.

The preterist interpretation does not keep with the context though since it is only a non-literal interpretation of the events spoken of in 24:15 or 24:21 that can be said to have taken place in 70 AD.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the events of Matthew 24:29-31 are connected to the abomination of desolation in 24:15. Kik recognizes this difficulty.

These words, they say, can only find fulfillment at the second coming of the Lord and have nothing whatsoever to do with the destruction of the Jewish dispensation and the city of Jerusalem.... The honest conclusion then is: Our Lord was mistaken when He said, “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”<sup>12</sup>

Our Lord was not mistaken though. *This generation* is not a reference to the first century, but is referring to that generation living when all the signs of Matthew 24 will take place. The

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<sup>11</sup> The reader should note the parallels between Acts 1:1-11 and Matthew 24:29-31 that clearly reveal Christ’s second coming is to the Mount of Olives.

<sup>12</sup> Kik, *Eschatology of Victory*, 31-32.

generation that will witness the entire signs take place will also witness the end. It is when Christ returns that faithful Israel will be regathered from their place of hiding during the tribulation in order to enter the millennial kingdom. At this time, the Land Covenant will be fulfilled (24:31; Isaiah 11:11-16; 27:13; Jeremiah 16:14, 15).

The questioning of the disciples in Matthew 24:3 involves one interrelated thought: (1) destruction of Jerusalem; and (2) new welcoming of Christ. In between would be a period of indefinite length when they would not see the Messiah. The chronology of events for the disciples would be: (1) Messiah would leave the nation of Israel and they would not see Him; (2) after a period of indefinite length, the destruction of Jerusalem would occur; and (3) immediately after Jerusalem's destruction, Messiah would appear.<sup>13</sup>

It would seem that Zechariah 14 was in the mind of the disciples. For instance, Zechariah 14:1-2 describes the deliverance of Jerusalem, 14:3-8 describes the Messiah's destruction of the enemies marching against Jerusalem, and 14:9-11 records the establishing of the millennium. The above chronology of events would be so fixated in the minds of the disciples that Luke only records the question concerning the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:7). In other words, the disciples understood the destruction of Jerusalem to indicate the coming of Messiah to reign in the millennium. Thus, the disciple's questions were interrelated. The disciples believed that the destruction of Jerusalem would result in the Messiah establishing the kingdom.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus separates the destruction of Jerusalem from His coming to establish the kingdom. Therefore, He warns against being deceived concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and cataclysmic events. The destruction of Jerusalem

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<sup>13</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 773.

and the Temple did not signify the end (Matthew 24:6). Jesus warns the disciples about being deceived concerning false messiahs, wars, and other events. In the verses following, Jesus provides a description of what the period will be like before His coming.

The questions then are Jewish in nature and all three questions involve one interrelated thought.<sup>14</sup> The frequent question that is then asked is, “Do the apostles represent Israel, the church, or both?” At times the apostles do represent the church, but the Jewishness of the questions in Matthew 24, in addition to the context, argues for the apostles asking questions in regards to Jewish believers prior to the coming of Messiah. Bruce Ware answers the question well:

But to show what the apostles *became* is not to prove what they were in Matthew 24. [One opponent (e.g. Gundry] argues that since numerous examples of the disciples representing the church can be found elsewhere in the New Testament, they must therefore represent the church in Matthew 24. This is like arguing that Abraham Lincoln represented the United States of America while he was a young, rail-splitting youth because there is much evidence from later in his life that he in fact did represent the nation as its president.<sup>15</sup>

Another argument that is brought out in this regard is that the apostles had an understanding of the church based on passages like Matthew 16:18 and 18:17. However, when the

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<sup>14</sup> See Granville Sharp, *Remarks on the Uses of the Definite Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament*, ed. W. D. McBrayer (Atlanta: Original Word, 1995), 8, as also referenced in Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 271-290.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce A. Ware, “Is the Church in View in Matthew 24-25?” in *Vital Prophetic Issues*, gen. ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 197.

“church” is mentioned in these passages there is no indication on the part of the apostles that they understand the mystery teaching of the church, nor is there any indication in the context that Jesus explained the “church” as mystery now revealed. The use of the word “church” in those passages would have been understood with a Jewish mindset as an “assembly.” The following quote demonstrates the national Jewish understanding of the word.

The word ἐκκλησία occur about 100 times in the LXX...When there is a Heb. Equivalent, it is almost always לְקָהָל...In the LXX ἐκκλησία is a wholly secular term; it means “assembly,” whether in the sense of assembling or of those assembled...The real point is who assembles, or who constitutes the assembly.<sup>16</sup>

Not only is it important to address the Jewish understanding of the word “church, but also it is necessary to demonstrate the Jewish understanding of “the end of the age.” According to Daniel 12:1-3 and Luke 20:28-40, the Jewish mindset of “the end of the age” meant the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of Old Testament saints. In Matthew 13, Jesus presents the mysteries of the kingdom. He will specifically outline the course of this age between the two mountain peaks of His first and second coming. The mystery kingdom will have both believers and unbelievers in it which will fill all parts of the world and society who profess devotion to Christ. The mystery kingdom is limited to this earth and has a reference of time from the national rejection of Jesus till the acceptance of Him as Messiah (Matthew 12; 23:39).

The mystery kingdom will be characterized by the sowing of the gospel seed and the true sowing will be imitated by a false counter sowing. Two results of this false counter sowing will be: 1) the mystery kingdom will assume huge outer proportions, and

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<sup>16</sup> Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III, trans. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 527.



2) it will be marked by inward corruption of doctrine. The next two results stem from the true sowing. First, God will gain a believing remnant from Israel, and secondly, He will gain believers from among the Gentiles. The end of the age will come with the judgment of Gentiles, bringing the righteous into the Messianic kingdom, while excluding the unrighteous.

In the parable of the tares among the wheat, the tares are separated “to burn” (καυμάτίζω), but the wheat is gathered into the barn. The aorist infinitive (“to burn”) is used with culminative sense thereby emphasizing a future purpose. The rapture will cause a preliminary separation of the wheat and tares, but in this parable that event is not even in view. Furthermore, in the parable of the good and bad fish the order is reversed. Both wheat and tares will grow side by side as a result of the true sowing and counter sowing, and the conclusion of the two developments will end with the righteous entering the blessings of the millennium and the wicked suffering destruction.

The apostles would be asking questions in Matthew 24-25 in regard to the final judgment and resurrection of Old Testament saints followed by the entrance into the kingdom of Messiah. Walvoord makes the following important comments:

In Matthew 24-25 the expositor should, therefore, understand that the program of God for the end of the age has in view the period ending with the second coming of Christ to the earth and the establishment of His earthly Kingdom, not the church age specifically ending with the rapture. Both the questions of the disciples and the answers of Christ are, therefore, keyed to the Jewish expectation based on Old Testament

prophecy, and the program of God for the earth in general rather than the church as the body of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

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

Matthew 24:4-14 (also Mark 13) does not directly answer the first question of the disciples. The reason for this has already been demonstrated since the questioning of the disciples in Matthew 24:3 actually involves one interrelated thought. Luke, on the other hand, does answer the question directly in his gospel (21:20-24). Matthew will only deal with the second question, “*What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*” His answer is interrelated to the first thought. Furthermore, Matthew does record the Lord’s prophecy of the future destruction of Jerusalem in 22:7. It is for this reason that it would be an inconsistent interpretation to find the church referenced anywhere in the Olivet Discourse.

Unfortunately, reference to the church age in the Olivet Discourse has not gone unmentioned. Such signs of Christ’s coming and the end of the age are frequently misinterpreted. It cannot be disputed that the birth pangs (false messiahs, wars, famines, and earthquakes) have not been lacking in the present age. However, the context of the Olivet Discourse in relation to the disciple’s questions and parallels in Revelation 6 indicate that these signs cannot be referring to the current age of the church.

After issuing a warning of *many* false messiahs,<sup>18</sup> Jesus uses a future tense (*mello*) to indicate that at the time of the false mes-

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<sup>17</sup> John F. Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the End of the Age: Part I,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 510 (April-June 1971): 116.

<sup>18</sup> In early Christianity, the Roman Empire ruled, to a large extent, the majority of the world. In regards to religion, the Roman Empire tolerated only those faiths that they considered legal. Judaism was one of those faiths. Since Christianity was regarded as a sect within Judaism, Christians were considered a legal sect. It was during this time that there was a growing dissension between non-Christian Jews and Christian Jews. The division between the two

siahs you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:4-6). A false peace and security, along with religious apostasy, characterize the beginning of the tribulation that will develop into multiple wars near and away from the land of Israel. This is just one reason why preterism is wrong in dating the fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse in 70 AD. At that time, Rome was at war with Israel only in contrast to the widespread war that Matthew 24 describes. All this is yet future and parallels John's description of the rider on the red horse in Revelation 6:4.

Furthermore, *the beginning of birth pangs* (24:8) indicates that the signs of the Olivet Discourse are occurring at a time immediately prior to the return of Christ to earth. This is in keeping with the analogy of birth pangs, since such pains do not occur at the beginning of pregnancy; rather, they occur at the end of pregnancy. The birth pangs indicate that the pregnancy will soon end. In the same manner, the signs of Matthew 24 do not take place during the current dispensation of the church, but take place only during the tribulation that is immediately prior to 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 your heads, because your redemption is drawing near* (24:8; Luke 21:28).

The signs of Matthew 24:4-8 are clear parallels to the first four seals of Revelation 6. Compared with Revelation 6, the

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groups climaxed in 132 AD when a revolt was led under the Jewish leader Shimon bar Kosiba (or Bar Kokhba, as he was later called). Under the leadership of Bar Kokhba, there were Jewish rebels who established an independent government. Bar Kokhba proclaimed himself as the Jewish messiah, which would be the first record of a false messiah. He attempted to rebuild the Temple and reinstitute the Temple rituals. His revolt ended in 135 AD when the Roman emperor Hadrian recaptured Jerusalem. Hadrian destroyed the Bar Kokhba temple and erected a pagan Roman temple (Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976], 13).

false messiahs (Matthew 24:4-5) are the first seal, or white horse. The wars (24:6) are the second seal, or red horse. The famines and earthquakes (24:7) are the third seal, or black horse. The death resulted from the wars (24:6-7) is the fourth seal, or pale horse. Martyrdom (24:9) is the fifth seal. The sixth seal would parallel the abomination of desolation as the midpoint of the tribulation.<sup>19</sup> The *great tribulation* (24:21) is the last 3 ½ years of Daniel’s Seventieth Week and is initiated with the abomination of desolation. The following chart visualizes how Matthew 24:4-20 parallels the first six seals of Revelation.

|              |                  |                    |             |
|--------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| False Christ | Matthew 24:5     | Revelation 6:2     | First Seal  |
| War          | Matthew 24:6     | Revelation 6:4     | Second Seal |
| Famine       | Matthew 24:7     | Revelation 6:5-6   | Third Seal  |
| Death        | Matthew 24:6-7   | Revelation 6:7-8   | Fourth Seal |
| Martyrs      | Matthew 24:9     | Revelation 6:9-11  | Fifth Seal  |
| Earthquake   | Matthew 24:15-20 | Revelation 6:12-17 | Sixth Seal  |

Matthew 24:7 (“for”) indicates that because *nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom people will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars.*<sup>20</sup> Since Matthew 24:6-7 parallels the second, third, and fourth seals it follows that the Antichrist is the one leading the wars against both nation and kingdom (cf. Dan. 7:8, 23-24; 9:36-45; 11:40-45; Zech. 12:2-11; Rev. 6:3-4; 12:9-17; 16:12-15; 17:14; 19:1; 20:8). Not only will nations throughout the world be rising against each other, but also the Antichrist will form his 10-nation confederacy that will be the basis of his eschatological kingdom.

<sup>19</sup> The corollary passages in Daniel 9:26-27; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14-19; Luke 21:23 (note that Luke says positively what Matthew says negatively; one is pronounced in woe; one is pronounced in blessing); Revelation 6:12-16 would support the view that the abomination of desolation takes place sometime 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).

<sup>20</sup> See H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: MacMillan, 1927), 242-243, for concurrence.

Matthew 24:9 (“then”) marks the transition of the tribulation period. The first half was characterized by relative peace in various parts of the world, but now judgment will intensify in Israel and throughout the world, especially when the Antichrist breaks his covenant with the Jewish nation (24:15; cf. Dan. 9:24-27). *The abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet* pertains to the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:24). The context remains Jewish in focus throughout the Olivet Discourse.

During this time the *gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations* (Matthew 24:14). The natural (plain) understanding of these words of Jesus to the disciples would have been in regards to the establishment of the messianic kingdom. In other words, it has no reference to the church age. The *gospel* (“good news”) of the kingdom is that *Yeshua HaMaschioch* will be returning soon to rule and reign. Even at the time of Christ’s ascension the disciples were asking, “*Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1:6). The disciples had no concept of the church age, but were eagerly anticipating the kingdom.

Indeed, the *gospel of the kingdom* will be good news to the tribulation saints. They will be enduring persecution and even martyrdom during the tribulation. Many of them will die as martyrs, *but the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved* (Mt. 24:13). The tribulation saints who endure to the end of the age, prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom, will be delivered from persecution and martyrdom during the tribulation to be allowed entrance into the kingdom in their natural bodies. It is a message to encourage perseverance.

### **The Second Half of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:21-41)**

Daniel 11:31 records the desecration of the Jewish Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, but does not mention the attendant time factor of the middle of one seven (9:26). However, in Matthew 24:15 the desecration of the rebuilt Jewish Temple will indicate the middle of the last, or seventieth, seven. It will be a clear sign during the tribulation of the nearness of Christ's return. This also demonstrates that the context of the Olivet Discourse is the nation of Israel. Preterists believe that there was a fulfillment when the Roman general, Titus, destroyed the Temple in 70 AD. The problem with such a view is that the return of Christ is connected with the desecration of the Temple.

Preterist Gary DeMar writes,

Scripture does not say that Jesus "could come at any moment." He promised that He would come before that first-century generation passed away (Matt. 24:34).... The Bible is so clear on this point that liberals have been sticking the point in the eye of futurists for more than a hundred years.<sup>21</sup>

Preterists insist that they are defending the Bible against liberal attacks from men such as Bertrand Russell<sup>22</sup> by arguing that the prophecies of Matthew 24 were fulfilled in the first century. Although preterists believe that they are employing a strong literal interpretation of passages such as Matthew 24:34, they are actually endorsing a liberal approach to the Scriptures since they deny a visible and bodily return of Jesus Christ. Preterists would argue that this will take place in the future, along with the gathering of the elect in Matthew 24:30-31. Only full preterism believes that *all these things* of Matthew 24:3-31 was fulfilled literally and completely among the generation living in the time of Christ. Therefore, the preterist's contention that

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<sup>21</sup> Gary DeMar, "Dispensationalism: Being 'Left Behind,'" Modern Reformation Society, <http://www>.

<sup>22</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 13, 56.

they hold to a literal interpretation of Matthew 24:34 betrays them.

Quoting 1 John 2:18, DeMar insists that the passage is referring to the first century. The more natural interpretation would be to refer the *last hour* to the current dispensation, not the destruction of Jerusalem. The time of this present age will grow more troublesome immediately preceding the second coming of Christ. However, it is also a time in which God is calling out a people for His name. John does affirm the presence of many antichrists in his own day and anticipates the coming of the Antichrist in a future day (Revelation 13:1-10). Since antichrists were present in John's day and have been present throughout church history, the *last hour* must be the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ. John does say in the first century, "even now many antichrists have arisen," but the appearing of these persons did not indicate that the current dispensation would end soon, rather they indicated that these were indeed the last times.

It is when the Jewish nation witnesses the signs of Matthew 24, especially the abomination of desolation, they will know that the end of the age and the coming of Christ are near. From the time of the abomination of desolation until the coming of Christ *there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world, until now, nor ever shall* (Matthew 24:21). At this point the Antichrist will break his covenant with the nation of Israel and will begin his persecution of the Jewish people (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15-21).

At this point in the Olivet Discourse, it would be particularly encouraging to the nation of Israel to have understanding of the second coming of Christ. In keeping with the context, it becomes obvious that this is the only *coming* that can be mentioned in Matthew 24:30-31, 36-44 (also the parallel passages in Mark 13:32-37 and Luke 17:26-37). For instance, in verses 29-30 it is

said *immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory*. It should be clear that this is not referring to the rapture of the church, since it would have no frame of reference to the questions of the disciples or to the context as a whole. Additionally, it would be confusing (to say the least) to introduce a new doctrine here; rather, it is contended that the revelation of the rapture teaching was a new doctrine given 2 days later as recorded in John 14.

There are some similar terms in these verses with certain rapture passages such as 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; and 2 Thessalonians 2:1. However, the dissimilarities far outweigh any alleged similarities. The rapture passages speak of the church being gathered to meet the Lord in the air to be taken to heaven, whereas here the angels *will gather together His elect* (Matthew 24:31). The term *elect* may refer to either Israel or the church, but context will always determine who is being spoken of. It is because of the context and terms such as the *gospel of the kingdom* (24:14), *the holy place* (24:15), *Sabbath* (24:20), the *Christ* as opposed to *false Christs* (24:23-24), that the *elect* in Matthew 24 must refer to the Jewish remnant in the tribulation.

Christ will now introduce *the parable from the fig tree* (24:32). Contrary to some dispensationalists that have referred to the fig tree as the rebirth of the nation of Israel, the parable is referring to *all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door* (24:33). The idea is that just as when a fig tree *puts forth its leaves*, one would *know that summer is near*, in the same manner, when all the signs of Matthew 24:4-24 take place will it be apparent that the return of Christ is near. Therefore, the parable is referring to those signs that will take place during the tribula-



tion, and inform *this generation* that witnesses the signs of the Olivet Discourse that the return of Christ is *right at the door*.

Therefore, in keeping with the context, the “one taken” and the “other left” is a reference to the separation that will take place when Christ returns to earth. The “one taken” is removed in death at the second coming and the “other left” is allowed entrance into the millennial kingdom. The response of Jesus to the disciples’ questioning (Luke 17:37; cf. Revelation 19:17-18) accurately fits this interpretation alone.

Alexander Reese, a posttribulationist, argues against the “taking away” to judgment. The Greek word for *took them away* in Matthew 24:39 is *airo* and the Greek word for *will be taken* in Matthew 24:40-41 is *paralambano*. It is because these two different Greek words are used that Reese believes the “taking away” is in the rapture. It is true that the usage of different words is noteworthy, but the context cannot be denied in the process of interpretation. Reese, however, argues his view against the “taking away” to judgment on the basis of the use of *paralambano* in Matthew 24:40-41.

The use of this word in the N.T. is absolutely opposed to this; it is a good word; a word used exclusively in the sense of “take away with” or “receive,” or “take home.”<sup>23</sup>

Reese’s arguments are forceful, but he is simply wrong as to his assertion that *paralambano* “is a good word.” Although it can be used to refer to a blessed event such as in John 14:3, it can also be used to refer to a “taking away” in judgment. For example, *paralambano* is used in John 19:17 where it records the religious leaders who *took* Jesus to be crucified. Likewise,

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<sup>23</sup> Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1932), 215.

Matthew 27:27 records the soldiers of the governor who *took* Jesus before the Roman cohort who proceeded to mock and beat Him. Such usages can hardly be “a good word.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, *airo* and *paralambano* are used synonymously as determined by the context of the Olivet Discourse.

The context indicates that the Olivet Discourse is dealing with the return of Christ to the earth in judgment prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom. The emphasis is not upon the unexpectedness of the time of the rapture; rather the focus is on unexpected judgment *just like the days of Noah* (Matthew 24:37).<sup>25</sup> First Thessalonians 5:1-8 gives the contrast between *they* (the unbeliever) and *you* (the believer). In other words, the believer will be anticipating the Lord’s return to earth, whereas the unbeliever will be caught off guard.

The comparison to the time of the flood indicates the judgment upon the unbelieving world. All that were removed in the days of Noah were “taken” in the flood and perished. By contrast, those who were not taken (Noah and his family) were allowed to survive the judgment. The context requires the parallelism to remain the same between those “taken” and “those left” in the days of Noah and time of Christ’s return to earth. The judgment is in regard to an unbelieving world (cf. Revelation 16:15). In this instance, it will be good for “the sheep”

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<sup>24</sup> *Paralambano* is also used in regard to the custody of Paul and Barnabas. Bruce Metzger notes in his comments on the alternative reading of Acts 16:35 as follows: “Here D 614 1799 2412 syr add the rather superfluous clause οὐς ἐχθὲς παρέλαβες (‘whom you took into custody yesterday’).” Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck, 1994), 399.

<sup>25</sup> Edersheim 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....” (*Jesus the Messiah*, 786).

(faithful) to be “left behind” since they will enter the millennium in their natural bodies. However, “the goats” (unfaithful) who are left behind will stand before the Messiah to receive their eternal retribution and exclusion from entering the kingdom (25:31-46).

*The coming of the Son of man* in Matthew 24:3, 27, 30, 37, 39, 42, and 44 is referring to the return of Christ to execute judgment and establish His kingdom on earth. It is for this reason there is an emphasis 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 all the signs of Matthew 24 are witnessed by a future generation, 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, then Luke 17:34-37 answers where *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, they are taken in death and their carcasses are fed to the vultures. Matthew 24:28 indicates the timing of this event will be after *the coming of the Son of Man* (cf. Revelation 19:17-19).

The passage does not specify that all unbelievers will be taken at that time. Some unbelievers will be around after Christ’s second coming. During the 75-day interval, Christ will judge the sheep and goats to determine who will enter into the millennial kingdom and who will be cast away into eternal punishment.

### **The Judgment of Gentiles (Mt. 24:42-25:46)**

Matthew 25 begins with the parable of the ten virgins. Although the parable is a continuation of Christ’s discourse concerning His coming, it does not mean necessarily that He is addressing the nation of Israel. It is certain that Israel will be

saved as a nation, in connection with the coming of the Son of Man, but the timing of that salvation needs to be made clear. In other words, is Israel saved in the Tribulation, at the second coming, or after the return of the Lord?

The question above relates to the individuals involved in the judgment of Matthew 25. For instance, if the tribulation itself is the specific judgment upon Israel, then at the second coming all Israel will be saved. Therefore, the national salvation would have occurred during the purging of the two-thirds of the nation in the Tribulation (cf. Zech. 13:8). This precludes the reference to the nation of Israel in Matthew 25. The judgment is toward the Gentiles at the time following the final and national restoration of Israel (cf. Joel 3:1-3). This would also make better sense since the regathering of Israel has already been addressed in Matthew 24:31.

The admonition in the parable of the ten virgins is that those who are not watchful will be excluded entrance into the millennium (25:1-13). Matthew 24:42-49 conveys the same point. The ten virgins represent Gentiles in the Tribulation. Some believe that the virgins represent true Christians and professing Christians in the current age.<sup>26</sup> It is true that the church is called “a pure virgin” (2 Corinthians 11:2), but the usage of a similar name does not prove that the church is in view here. Both the content and context would argue that the entire discourse is speaking solely of tribulation period (cf. Matthew 24:3, 8, 14-15, 27, 30-31, 33, 42, 44, 47, 51).

The adverb *then* [*tote*] connecting Matthew 24:51 and 25:1 refers back to 24:40. All the virgins have been anticipating Christ’s coming, but only the five wise virgins are ready for His coming. They are like *the faithful and sensible slave* of Matthew 24:45 for they are *prudent* [*phronimoi*], the fruit of being faithful

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<sup>26</sup> Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition*, Vol. 1 (New York City: Our Hope, 1910), 228-232.

[*pistoi*]. In contrast, the five foolish virgins did not prepare for their Messiah and were caught unprepared.

Oil is often symbolic of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1; Zechariah 4), but its symbolism is not limited to the Holy Spirit. The symbolism can also be used when not referring to the Holy Spirit (Genesis 28:18; Ecclesiastes 12:6; Matthew 21:33-46). Furthermore, since the words “spirit” and “life” are nearly synonymous (cf. John 6:63; Romans 8:2, 10; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Revelation 11:11; 13:15), it can be contended that oil would stand for life itself (either spiritual life by the Spirit or earthly life by man’s spirit).

If oil is restricted to symbolic meaning of the Holy Spirit, then its use in Matthew 25:1-13 would contradict the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. The five foolish virgins say to the prudent, “*Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out*” (25:8). If the oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, then the foolish are having salvation extinguished, since possession of the Holy Spirit in the current dispensation is equivalent to eternal salvation. It would appear that their relationship with Christ was mere profession only, for of those five virgins, Jesus says, “*I do not know you*” (25:12), which is reminiscent of many in the last days (7:23).

It is when the interpretation that the oil is symbolic of life in Matthew 25:1-13 that the parable is better understood. The prudent virgins not only had oil burning in their lamps (physical life), but also they had extra oil (spiritual life) when they met the bridegroom. The eternal life could not be given to the five foolish virgins. For that reason they were told to go and get some oil (spiritual life) for themselves (25:9). *While they were going away*, those Gentiles who were not ready for the coming of Christ to earth will be excluded from entrance into the millennium. The *lamps are going out* (physical life) for the foolish when the Lord returns. Only the righteous will enter into the

millennium, but all the wicked will be destroyed prior to the establishment of the millennium (as the parable of the talents teaches). Furthermore, the use of the future passive, *comparable* [*omoiothesetai*], anticipates the eschatological reign of Messiah. It is at that future time that the symbol of *the kingdom of heaven* will be realized, hence the necessity of being *on the alert* (25:13).

The background of the parable of the virgins is the Middle Eastern marriage custom. The marriage contract would be consummated 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 of time 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 (Revelation 19:7-10).<sup>27</sup>

The parable of the talents illustrates the certainty of Christ's judgment upon unredeemed Gentiles during the tribulation (Matthew 25:14-30) since the conjunction *for* in Matthew 25:14 would connect the parable to the prior context. Whereas, the parable of the virgins emphasized spiritual alertness (25:13), this parable emphasizes faithful service as demonstrated by the prominent usage of slave (25:14, 19, 21, 23, 26, 30).

Christ will say to the faithful servant, "*You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master*" (25:21). In the millennial kingdom, he will be rewarded with privileged responsibility. Matthew

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<sup>27</sup> George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952), 3:301. The wedding at Cana in Galilee is an example of the Jewish custom of marriage (see John 2:1-12).

13:12 reiterates the same teaching for there is reads, *For whosoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.* The preaching of the gospel of the kingdom has been entrusted particularly to the Jewish nation, but those saved Gentiles will also bear the responsibility. Those Gentiles who are spiritually prepared for the Messiah's return will faithfully carry out their responsibility. They will be among those to whom *it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven* (13:11). Those who are unfaithful will *keep on hearing, but will not understand and will keep on seeing, but will not perceive* (13:14).

The judgment of Matthew 25:31-46 also concerns the Gentiles. At this judgment some will inherit the kingdom while others are eternally condemned. The basis of the judgment is whether or not Gentiles extended help to the godly remnant of Israel (*one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them*). The sheep represent the tribulation saints, whereas the goats represent the unbelievers. This judgment is distinct from the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:13-15, since at that judgment only the wicked will appear before the Judge.

### **Conclusion**

Consistent pretribulationists should not interpret any of the signs of Matthew 24 as taking place today since all of the events fit into the eschatological period of the tribulation. Certainly, there are "signs of the times," but that is all that can be said. The context of the Matthew 24 is distinctly Jewish, and Jesus responds to their questions about the events that will affect the nation of Israel culminating in the return of the Messiah and establishment of His kingdom on earth.

Since the tribulation is the specific judgment upon Israel in preparation of the return of Messiah then the judgments of Mat-

thew 25 address the faithfulness of Gentiles following the restoration of Israel in the tribulation. There is always one interpretation of Scripture, but applications can be numerous. Since the church is nowhere seen in the Olivet Discourse this does not mean that there are not lessons of faithfulness that can be heeded today. The danger for pretribulationists who will be consistent in their interpretation is not to make similarities of rapture truth equivalent to future fulfillment in Matthew 24-25.

—End—

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