

## AN INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 24—25

Part V

by Thomas Ice

As I demonstrated in my previous installment, Matthew 24:4–14 deals with events of the first half of the seven-year tribulation period known as “the beginning of birth pangs” (Matt. 24:8). These events are parallel to the seal and trumpet judgments of Revelation 6, 8—9. I take it that in Christ’s discourse “The disciples were the representatives of godly Jews, and were warned of what should befall their nation.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, this passage, which is before us will take place in the future, after the rapture of the church, at the time of the beginning of the tribulation.

### DO NOT BE DECEIVED

Since the tribulation begins with the arrival of the antichrist on the scene, it is not surprising that this section also begins with a warning to believers about his arrival. Jesus begins answering the disciple’s question with a warning about false messiahs. “And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many’” (Matt. 24:4–5).

I think William Kelly is correct to note that this passage is not referencing Christians during the current church age.

In the epistles of Paul it is never exactly such a thought as warning persons against false Christs. For there the Holy Ghost addresses us as Christians; and a Christian could not be deceived by a man’s pretensions to be Christ. It is most appropriate here, because the disciples are viewed in this chapter, as representatives, not of us Christians now, but of future godly Jews.<sup>2</sup>

The first thing Jesus tells them is to make sure that no one misleads you. Spiritual deception will be the primary purpose of the Antichrist during the tribulation and thus a primary item to be avoided. “This warning was prompted by their eagerness for a sign. The danger of being misled was increased if one was too enthusiastic or anticipated some symbolic indication of the event.”<sup>3</sup> Dr. Stanley Toussaint tells us:

The key to understanding the discourse is found in this first sentence. The disciples thought that the destruction of Jerusalem with its great temple would usher in the end of the age. The Lord separates the two ideas and warns the disciples against being deceived by the destruction of Jerusalem and other such catastrophes. The razing of the temple and the presence of wars and rumors of wars do not necessarily signify the nearness of the end.<sup>4</sup>

### MANY FALSE CHRISTS

Why are they to be on guard against deception? Vigilance will be needed since there will be during the tribulation a host of those claiming to be the Messiah and many will believe them. But the Jewish believers during the tribulation are not to fall for that line.

The emphasis in verse 5 is upon “many.” Not just a single person will come claiming to be the Messiah, but a whole host of individuals will make such claims. Multiple claims to Messiahship is one of the reasons why this passage is not referring to events leading up to the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. A. H. M’Neile says, “No such

definite claim to Messiahship is known till that of Barkokba in the reign of Hadrian."<sup>5</sup> The Barkokba revolt was put down by the Romans in A.D. 135 when Hadrian led the Roman legions to once again destroy Jerusalem, and the surrounding area, which resulted in the death of half a million Jews.<sup>6</sup> Robert Gundry notes the following:

The lack of evidence that anyone claimed messiahship between Jesus and Bar-Kokhba a hundred years later militates against our seeing the discourse as a *vaticinium ex eventu* [a prophecy of an event] concerning the first Jewish revolt (A.D. 66–73). False prophets figured in that revolt (Josephus *J.W.* 6.5.2 §§285-87; 7.11.1 §§437-39; *Ant.* 20.5.1 §97); but one did not have to claim messiahship to be a false prophet. Cf. Acts 5:36; 8:9; 21:38.<sup>7</sup>

James R. Gray tells us, "strict claims to the Messianic office in the strictest sense are almost nonexistent in history."<sup>8</sup> However, in the future, this passage tells us it will be rampant.

### THE FIRST SEAL JUDGMENT

As noted in my previous article, the judgments of Matthew 24:4–11 parallel in order the first five seal judgments of Revelation 6:1–11. "The first seal depicts a false Messiah,"<sup>9</sup> as observed in Revelation 6:1–2.

And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer. (Rev. 6:1–2)

Arno Gaebelein, that great Bible teacher from a former generation says the following about this similarity:

The rider upon the white horse under the first seal is a counterfeit. He is a false Christ, who goes forth to conquer. His conquest is a bloodless one, as he has only a bow. He will bring about a false peace among the nations, which for a time may have been alarmed by the supernatural removal of the church. The second rider "takes peace from the earth," from which we would conclude that the first rider upon the white horse (white emblem of peace) has established peace.

And as we turn to Matthew xxiv we find that the first thing our Lord saith, is about the deceivers who will come with the beginning of the age ending saying: "I am Christ," and succeeding to lead away many.<sup>10</sup>

### WHAT IS THE NATIONALITY OF THE ANTICHRIST?

A widely held belief throughout the history of the church has been the notion that Antichrist will be of Jewish origin. This view is still widely held in our own day. However, upon closer examination we find no real Scriptural basis for such a view.

#### *Arguments for a Jewish Origin*

Three reasons are often given in support of the argument that Antichrist will be Jewish.<sup>11</sup> First, it is argued that he will be a Jew since the Jews are responsible for the

world's problems. Thus, it follows that the greatest problem of history—Antichrist—will also be Jewish. This is the Anti-Semitic reason. It should be clear that since Anti-Semitism is unbiblical, and so is any logic that reasons upon such a premise.

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum offers a refutation of the second reason, which he calls "The Logical Reason." He writes:

Stated in a syllogism, this argument goes as follows:

MAJOR PREMISE: The Jews will accept the Antichrist as the Messiah

MINOR PREMISE: The Jews will never accept a Gentile as the Messiah.

CONCLUSION: The Antichrist will be a Jew.<sup>12</sup>

The difficulties of this argument are many, not the least of which are the two premises. Neither premise can be supported from the Bible. Just because the Jews make a covenant with the Antichrist (Dan. 9:27; Isa. 28:15), it does not follow either textually or logically that they accept him as Messiah (or Antichrist). Second, since they are not accepting him as Messiah, the fact that he is a Gentile peacemaker is irrelevant. Thus, the conclusion does not follow.

An attempt at a Scriptural argument reasons that Antichrist will spring forth from the tribe of Dan. This has been a view that has been widely held throughout church history, from the earliest times to our modern day. Support for this view is inappropriately derived from Genesis 49:17; Deuteronomy 33:22; Jeremiah 8:16; Daniel 11:37; Revelation 7:4-8. Even though many passages are cited in support of this argument, none of them actually support the notion since they are all taken out of context. In reality, only Daniel 11:37 refers to the Antichrist. Even though some believe that the phrase in Daniel 11:37 "the God of his fathers" (KJV), implies a Jewish apostasy, the phrase is more accurately translated "the gods of his fathers" (NASB). Since Antichrist will be a Gentile, as will be shown, the argument is unfounded. Since the original Hebrew supports the NASB translation and not the KJV, Antichrist's apostasy will be Christian and not Jewish.<sup>13</sup>

### *Arguments for a Gentile Origin*

We have seen that the Bible does not teach that Antichrist will be Jewish; however, Scripture does teach that he will be of Gentile descent. This can first be seen from biblical typology. Most commentators agree that Daniel 11 speaks of Antiochus Epiphanes, a Gentile, who typifies the future Antichrist. Since Antiochus is a Gentile, then so will be Antichrist.

Secondly, biblical imagery supports a Gentile origin of Antichrist. Scripture pictures Antichrist as rising up out of the sea (Rev. 13:1; 17:15). In prophetic literature the sea is an image of the Gentile nations. Thus, Antichrist is seen as a Gentile progeny.

Thirdly, the nature of the "Times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24) supports a Gentile Antichrist. Fruchtenbaum notes:

It is agreed by all premillennialists that the period known as the Times of the Gentiles does not end until the second coming of Christ. It is further agreed that the Antichrist is the final ruler of the Times of the Gentiles. . . .

If this is so, how then can a Jew be the last ruler at a time when only Gentiles can have the preeminence? To say the Antichrist is to be a Jew would contradict the very nature of the Time of the Gentiles.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the Bible not only teaches that Antichrist will be Gentile, but it also implies that he will be of Roman descent. This is understood from Daniel 9:27, where the one cutting a covenant with Israel is said to represent the revived Roman Empire, since it was the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70. The revived Roman empire comes from a second phase of the Roman Empire, i.e., “feet partly of iron and partly of clay” (Dan 2:33, 40–45).

The implications of the non-Jewishness of the antichrist has significant implications as noted by Gray:

Because the true Anti-Christ is not a Jew (cp Daniel 7, 11, Revelation 13:1), therefore he will not claim to be a false Messiah. These false claimants will be contemporaneous with Antichrist and will likely oppose him. During this time Israel will have many options and opportunities to follow false Messiahs, yet, the Antichrist will not be one of them. He comes as a benefactor of Israel, a great world diplomat turned persecutor, but not a Messianic deliverer. He will be worshipped, not as Messiah, but as God.<sup>15</sup>

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> William Kelly, *Lectures on The Gospel of Matthew* (Sunbury, PA: Believers Bookshelf, 1971 [1868]), p. 479.

<sup>2</sup> Kelly, *Matthew*, p. 479.

<sup>3</sup> Ed Glasscock, *Matthew: Moody Gospel Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p. 464.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold The King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 270.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Hugh M'Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: MacMillan, 1915), p. 345.

<sup>6</sup> Roman historian “Dio Cassius relates that the Romans demolished 50 fortresses, destroyed 985 villages, and killed 580,000 people in addition to those who died of hunger, disease, and fire.” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 17 vols. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 233.

<sup>7</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, second edition, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 477.

<sup>8</sup> James R. Gray, *Prophecy on The Mount: A Dispensational Study of the Olivet Discourse* (Chandler, AZ: Berean Advocate Ministries, 1991), p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas O. Figart, *The King of The Kingdom of Heaven: A Verse by Verse Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Lancaster, PA: Eden Press, 1999), p. 438.

<sup>10</sup> Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, [1910] 1961), pp. 481–82.

<sup>11</sup> These three reasons were gleaned from Arnold Fruchtenbaum, “The Nationality of the Anti-Christ” (Englewood, NJ: American Board of Missions To The Jews, n.d.).

<sup>12</sup> Fruchtenbaum, “Nationality,” p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Fruchtenbaum, “Nationality,” pp. 11–22.

<sup>14</sup> Fruchtenbaum, “Nationality,” pp. 24, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Gray, *Prophecy on The Mount*, p. 29.