

CONCERNING THE WAY

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LESSON 57: PROPHECY SERIES — THE OLIVET DISCOURSE



Continuing our study of Matthew 24...

Matthew 24:26-28 So then, if someone says to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe him. (27) For just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. (28) Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

When the Messiah does return, it will be so public that there will not be any doubt that He has arrived. It will be the false Christs and false prophets who will try to deceive people by spreading rumors of secret appearances. Also, this passage shouts that the return of Jesus will be a bodily, physical and public advent.

Heinrich Meyer says: "The advent of the Messiah will not be of such a nature that you will require to be directed to look here or look there in order to see him; but it will be as the lightning, which as soon as it appears, suddenly announces its presence everywhere; . . . what is meant is, that when it takes place, it will all of a sudden openly display itself in a glorious fashion over the whole world." The return of the Messiah will be seen all over the world, not just locally.

To review, Jesus tells us eight things in Matthew 24:15-28 about the 2nd half of the Tribulation:

1. The Abomination of Desolation
2. The signal for the Jews to flee the land
3. The reason for the flight of the Jews is because extreme anti-Semitism will break out.
4. Israel will survive, but in greatly reduced numbers
5. There will be false messiahs
6. There will be false signs and wonders for the purpose of worldwide deception, apparently by the antichrist, the false prophet, and other false messiahs.
7. There will be people saying that Jesus has returned in one or place or another, but we are not to believe it, because, unlike His first coming, His 2nd coming will not be in secret. This time everyone will see it, there will be no doubt.
8. Christ gives a hint as to the place of His coming in verse 28. The corpse refers to Israel, while the vultures refers to the Gentile nations coming against Israel during Armageddon. It appears that Christ will return to earth where the body of Israel is and where the Gentile nations are gathered together. This place is known as Bozrah in Hebrew, or Petra in Greek (Jeremiah 49:12-14, Micah 2:12-13, Isaiah 34:1-7, 63:1-6).

Now Jesus will answer the 2nd question – What will be the sign of your coming?

Matthew 24:29 "Immediately after the suffering of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.

AFTER THE TRIBULATION OF THOSE DAYS

After mentioning the second coming of Christ in verses 27–28 describing how He will appear, in this next section, Jesus continues to describe His return. The first thing Christ says is that His return will take place "immediately after the tribulation (suffering) of those days." This means that the events described in the

rest of verses 29–31 will occur immediately after the events of the tribulation. This seems clear enough.

Jesus is saying that just before He comes, there will be a total blackout of the earth. There will be no light from the sun, moon, or stars. Matthew 24:29 is not a new revelation by the Lord. Old Testament passages like Isaiah 13:9–10 and Joel 2:31; 3:15 also talk about this “black out” and light show that will happen “immediately after the tribulation,” in preparation for Christ’s second coming. These Old Testament passages refer to the same future events that Christ describes in verse 29.

Isaiah 13:9-10 Look, the LORD's day of judgment is coming; it is a day of cruelty and savage, raging anger, destroying the earth and annihilating its sinners. (10) Indeed the stars in the sky and their constellations no longer give out their light; the sun is darkened as soon as it rises, and the moon does not shine.

Joel 2:31 The sunlight will be turned to darkness and the moon to the color of blood, before the day of the LORD comes — that great and terrible day!

Joel 3:1-2 For look! In those days and at that time I will return the exiles to Judah and Jerusalem. (2) Then I will gather all the nations, and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. I will enter into judgment against them there concerning my people Israel who are my inheritance, whom they scattered among the nations.

Joel 3:15 The sun and moon; the stars withhold their brightness.

It makes sense that the heavens and earth are physically affected by man's sin at the end of history, just as nature went through physical change when man fell at the beginning of history. Genesis and Revelation tell the beginning and ending of history. Noah's flood had physical effects, and so will the judgment of the tribulation prior to Christ's return. Leon Morris tells us: *“There is to be no source of light here on earth in that day. It accords with what will happen to sun, moon, and stars that the powers of the heavens will be shaken. . . . Whatever functions they may be exercising at the time will be affected by the great fact that the Son of man is coming back to this earth to bring an end to the current system and to inaugurate the reign of God over all the earth.”*

STARS FALLING

The text says, “the stars will fall from heaven.” It does not say that stars will fall to the earth. Aster, the Greek word for star, can refer to physical stars in the sky (Matthew 2:2, 7, 9–10) or it can be used figuratively as a symbol, referring to people and angels (Jude 13, Rev. 8:10–11; 9:1). However, stars literally do fall from heaven upon the earth. They are called “falling stars,” “shooting stars,” “comets,” or “meteors.” The Greek word for star can be used in this way. Stars that fall to the earth usually disintegrate and burn up as they enter the earth's atmosphere, but not all of them. Many commentators see the falling stars as meteorites. *“The most likely identification of these particular falling stars is that of a great swarm of asteroids that pummel the earth,”* says Henry Morris. Falling stars are what cause the people of the earth to hide in caves in Revelation 6:12-17.

POWERS OF THE HEAVENS

The same basic phrase is used in all three accounts of the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:26). The phrase “powers of the heavens” most likely means the sun, moon, and stars, since they have been specifically mentioned earlier in the verse. Leon Morris says, *“The word for heaven is singular in the reference to the stars, but plural where the powers are spoken of. Thus the Lord describes the astronomical bodies being shaken as the earth is in an earthquake.”* The specific phrase “powers of the heavens” is never used of angelic beings in the Bible, nor does the context support that interpretation. Jesus is saying that, whatever the powers of the heavens may be, they are subject to God, and that at this time of the return of the Messiah to this earth, their power will be disturbed. John MacArthur explains: *“All*

the forces of energy, here called powers of the heavens, which hold everything in space constant, will be in dysfunction. The heavenly bodies will careen helter-skelter through space, and all navigation, whether stellar, solar, magnetic, gyroscopic, will be futile because all stable reference points and uniform natural forces will have ceased to exist or else become unreliable”.

A HEAVENLY SHAKING

Most commentators see that the shaking of the heavens in this passage is an allusion from Haggai 2:6:

Haggai 2:6 Moreover, the LORD who rules over all says: 'In just a little while I will once again shake the sky and the earth, the sea and the dry ground.

What does this passage mean? We have a divine New Testament commentary that we can look to in Hebrews 12 that tells us what it means.

Hebrews 12:26-28 Then his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "I will once more shake not only the earth but heaven too." (27) Now this phrase "once more" indicates the removal of what is shaken, that is, of created things, so that what is unshaken may remain. (28) So since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us give thanks, and through this let us offer worship pleasing to God in devotion and awe.

The writer of Hebrews compares the first shaking of the earth, a physical one, at the Exodus with a future shaking, which will include the heavens as well. The future shaking will be much greater than the past shaking since it will include the heavens as well. Since the first shaking at the Exodus was physical then it follows that the second shaking will also be a physical one. Now let's go back to Jesus' discourse:

Luke 21:25-27 "And there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth nations will be in distress, anxious over the roaring of the sea and the surging waves. (26) People will be fainting from fear and from the expectation of what is coming on the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (27) Then they will see the Son of Man arriving in a cloud with power and great glory.

Matthew 24:30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

The second coming of Christ will be an event that has multiple aspects to it. Jesus will not just appear in the sky and that is it, but there will be many events that will take place in the process of his coming. Christ continues to tell about the sequence that will take place at this time in history. One of the important events will be "the sign of the Son of Man" that will appear in the sky.

SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN

Earlier in Matthew 24:3 the disciples of Jesus ask Him, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" This passage answers the question about the sign of Christ's coming. So what is that sign? First, understand that the sign and His coming are separate events. We know that the stage for his return begins in verse 29 with a shaking of the sun, moon and stars. This causes a blackout of the sky, preparing for the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man, followed by the response of people mourning and being afraid, and then finally the second coming of Christ.

Second, this sequence of events will take place in Jerusalem in Israel. This is the location on planet earth in which these things are scripted to take place, even though they will have a global impact. Third, I believe

that the sign of the Son of Man will be some form of the manifestation of the Shechinah Glory. This will be an unbelievable sight, breaking through the complete darkness.

THE SHECHINAH GLORY

We have seen the Shechinah Glory before in our study of the book of Exodus. What is the Shechinah Glory? The Shechinah Glory is the visible manifestation of the presence of God, often showing up in the form of a cloud, light, fire, or combinations of these. The Hebrew word Shechinah does not appear in the biblical text. The Jewish rabbis coined the expression “Shechinah Glory,” in order to describe those biblical passages where they believe that a physical glory cloud or light was present when the Hebrew word for “glory” was used. Shechinah is a form of a Hebrew word that literally means “he caused to dwell,” meaning that when God’s glory appeared in this way it was a Divine visitation of the presence or dwelling of God in the glory cloud. In order to see the significance of the Shechinah Glory for future Bible prophecy, we need to look at past appearances:

The following events are believed to be manifestations of the Shechinah Glory in history:

- The Garden of Eden—the Lord’s presence in the Garden and the flaming sword (Genesis 3:8,23-24).
- The Abrahamic Covenant—the flaming torch that passed between the sacrificial pieces (Genesis 15:12-18).
- The Burning Bush—the burning that did not consume the bush (Exodus 3:1-5; 13:21-22; 14:19-20, 24; 16:6-12).
- The Exodus—the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Exodus).
- Mount Sinai—the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God; thunders, lightnings, and a thick cloud (Exodus 19:16-20; 24:15-18 Deuteronomy 5:22-27).
- The Special Meeting with Moses—the afterglow of Moses’ face as a result of his meeting with the Lord (Exodus 33:17-23; 34:5-9, 29-35; 29:42-46; 40:34-38).
- The Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant—the glory-cloud presence often associated with these items (Exodus).
- The Book of Leviticus—the authentication of the Law and residing in the holy of holies (Leviticus 9).
- The Book of Numbers—the Shechinah Glory rendered judgment for sin and disobedience (Numbers 13:30–14:45; 16:1-50; 20:5-13).
- The Period of Joshua and Judges—the continued dwelling of the Shechinah Glory in the tabernacle (1 Samuel 4:21-22).
- The Solomonic Temple—the transfer of the Shechinah Glory from the tabernacle to the Temple (2 Chronicles 5:2–7:3).
- The Departure in Ezekiel—Ezekiel watches the Shechinah Glory depart the Temple in preparation for judgment upon the nation (Ezekiel 1:28; 3:12, 23; 8:3-4; 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23).
- The Second Temple—the Shechinah Glory was not present, but a promise was given that it will be greater in the future than in the past (Haggai 2:3, 9).
- The Appearance to the Shepherds—the glory of the Lord shone round about them (Luke 2:8-9).
- The Star of Bethlehem—the star or glory-cloud that guided the Magi to Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12).
- The Transfiguration—the Shechinah Glory appears to the three disciples (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36, Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:16-18; Revelation 1:12-16).
- The Book of Acts—the cloven tongues of fire on Pentecost and the blinding light shown upon Paul at his conversion (Acts 2:1-3; 9:3-8; 22:6-11; 26:13-18).
- The Revelation—Jesus Christ is dressed in the Shechinah Glory (Revelation 1:12-16).

The following are future events relating to the Shechinah Glory:

- The Tribulation—the Shechinah Glory is connected with the Bowl judgments (Revelation 15:8).

- The Second Coming of Christ—the Shechinah Glory is the sign of the Son of Man and the cloud upon which He returns (Matthew 16:27; 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27).
- The Millennium—the Shechinah Glory will be present in its greatest manifestation in history because of Christ's physical presence on earth (Ezekiel 43:1-7; 44:1-2; Isaiah 4:5-6; 11:10; 35:1-2; 40:5; 58:8-9; 60:1-3; Zechariah 2:4-5; 11:10)
- The Eternal State—the Shechinah Glory will provide light for the new creation where sin will be totally removed and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit will dwell in fullness with man (Revelation 21:1-3, 10-11, 23-24).

Matthew 24:30 reminds us of the other event that will happen when Christ appears, as described in Zechariah:

Zechariah 12:9-10 **So on that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem." (10) "I will pour out on the kingship of David and the population of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced. They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn.**

Stanley Toussaint: *"It will be conceded by all that the first part of Matthew 24:30 looks back to Zechariah 12:10. However, it is important to notice that in Zechariah the mourning of 12:10 is explained by the verses that follow. It is a repentant lamentation by Israel because it results in the purification of the nation (Zechariah 13:1). The context of Zechariah 12:10 is most significant. Rather than prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem, it is predicting the opposite. Verse 9 looks ahead to God's future deliverance of Israel when Jerusalem will again be surrounded by enemies. "In that day" is prophetic of a time of deliverance of Israel, not judgment. (Note the constant repetition of "in that day" [12:3, 4, 6, 8 (2x), 9, 11; 13:1, 2, 4]). It is clear that the context of Zechariah is a mourning that results in cleansing and deliverance for Israel. **Whatever the sign of the Son of Man is, it results in the national repentance of Israel.** This parallels perfectly what Paul says in Romans 11:25-27. This explanation of Matthew 24:30a sets the stage for the understanding of the last half of the verse."*

ALL THE TRIBES OF THE EARTH WILL MOURN

We have seen up to this point that God is preparing the stage for the most spectacular event in all human history—the glorious return of Jesus Christ to planet earth to reign for a thousand years. First, this will happen after the events of the Tribulation (24:29). Second, it will interrupt the war of Armageddon. Third, God will darken the sky by causing the sun, moon and stars to cease shining. Fourth, in the midst of this darkness, the sign of the Son of Man will burst out in brilliant light and glory. Finally, then, the stage will be set for Jesus to return to planet earth—to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. This is the point at which Jesus says, "then all the tribes of the earth will mourn."

When you see the word tribes, you may be thinking this refers to the Jews, but it is not. If it were Israel, it would say all the Tribes of Israel. But it says All the Tribes of the Earth. This refers to the Gentiles. Remember that the surviving remnant of Jews immediately recognize their Messiah when He appears and repent. But all the unbelieving Gentiles will see Christ, and realize that their defeat and destruction is near. They will certainly fall on their knees in despair and mourning. Most likely it will be mourning that they did not turn to Christ when they had the chance, because, as we discussed in the last lesson, everyone will have one last chance as the gospel is preached to the whole world before the antichrist forces everyone to take his mark.

In summary, Matthew 24:30 describes a visible appearance of the sign of the Son of Man, the repentance of Israel and the triumphant return of Christ to reign on planet earth. That is the answer that Jesus gives to

His disciples. So Jesus has now answered all three questions the disciples asked Him, but He chooses to give more information:

Matthew 24:31 **And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.**

(also Mark 13:27) Jesus is describing here the final regathering of the Jews from all over the world, prophesied many places in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 30:1-10, Isaiah 11:11-12:6, Ezekiel 36, 37, Isaiah 27:12-13 are only a few). Remember that there are two regatherings prophesied. The first one in unbelief, beginning in 1948 and continuing today. The second one will be after the nation recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah, and He returns (verse 27).

In the process of that return, apparently as our Lord descends, He will send out His angels to gather in the Jewish, believing remnant that He will rescue from the danger of all the world's armies who have gathered by the anti-Christ in an attack upon Israel and Jerusalem. And they won't be using El Al Airlines, as many Jews do now to return to Israel. Angels will go and get 'em.

"The Elect" means the same as we have seen before in Matthew 24, it is Jewish believers. If you're not sure about that, let me remind you once again of a verse we've already studied in Daniel:

Daniel 12:1 **"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.**

This passage in Daniel uses the phrase "everyone who is found written in the book," to refer to Jewish individuals who will come to faith in Christ during the tribulation period, which is the context of this passage. Christ, who may have been thinking of this passage from Daniel, shortens the phrase "everyone who is found written in the book," to "the elect." So elect is a term that refers to an individual, in this context a Jewish person, whom the Lord knows will come to faith in Christ. It is not just any individual who will come to faith in Christ during the tribulation, but it is speaking exclusively of Jews here, as it says "your (Daniel's) people" in this verse.

All right, we must stop here and discuss Matthew 24:31, because this verse is used to theorize a "posttribulational rapture, which is, for most people of this persuasion, means they don't believe the rapture and the 2nd coming are two separate events. I contend that this verse is not about the Rapture of the Church. Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the undisputed rapture passage, as a baseline for defining the rapture:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 **But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (15) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.**

This is the best definition of the Rapture of the Church. You say, well, this does kind of sound like the same event. Everyone would agree there are some similarities, but there are some important differences. There are also some similarities between Christ's first advent 2,000 years ago and His second advent. But they are not the same events. We know they are not the same because of the differences.

We'll talk about the Rapture in more detail in our next lesson, but we'll quickly list some differences here. Paul never mentions the darkening of the sun (Matthew 24:29), the moon not giving its light (Matthew 24:29), the stars falling from the sky (Matthew 24:29), the powers of the heavens being shaken (Matthew 24:29), all the tribes of the earth mourning (Matthew 24:30), all the world seeing the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:30), or God sending forth angels (Matthew 24:31).

Also, in Matthew the angels gather the elect; in 1 Thessalonians the Lord Himself (note the emphasis) gathers the believers. Thessalonians speaks of the voice of the archangel, Matthew doesn't. In the Olivet Discourse nothing is said about a resurrection, while in the latter text it is the central point. In the two passages the differences in what will take place prior to the appearance of Christ is striking. And, the order of ascent is absent from Matthew (the dead, then the living).

In addition to those differences, the order of events are different between the two passages. In 1 Thessalonians 4 believers are gathered in the air and taken to heaven, while in Matthew 24 they are gathered after Christ's arrival to earth. Finally, the term "elect" is problematic for a post-tribber. The "elect", in the context of this entire chapter, and in association with the parallel Daniel passage, has to be the Jews, it does not refer to the church. In the Thessalonians passage, Paul is speaking to the church. The church isn't mentioned anywhere in Matthew 24. So, the differences in the two passages support the contention that they speak of two distinct events.

To me, the most convincing reason why Matthew 24:31 is not a rapture statement is found in the fact that this verse includes citations from Old Testament passages, specifically Deuteronomy 30:4. These references clearly teach that this angelic gathering, which was predicted in the Old Testament, references a regathering of saved Jews who need to be returned to the land of Israel in which they will live for a thousand years during Christ's Kingdom. Instead of using El Al airlines, the Lord will use angelic carriers to transport His people back to their land. What is the support for this view? Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum tells us the following about the use of Old Testament citations in Matthew 24:31:

"The Matthew passage is a rather simple summary of all that the prophets had to say about the second facet of Israel's final restoration. Its purpose was to make clear that the world-wide regathering predicted by the prophets will be fulfilled only after the second coming."

Dr. Renald Showers has done an excellent job collecting evidence and arguing for this view. After noting that "from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" means that "the elect will be gathered from all over the world at Christ's coming," Dr. Showers provides three lines of proof for his view as follows:

First, because of Israel's persistent rebellion against God, He declared that He would scatter the Jews "into all the winds" (Ezekiel 5:10, 12) or "toward all winds" (Ezekiel 17:21). In Zechariah 2:6 God stated that He did scatter them abroad "as four winds of the heavens." . . . God did scatter the Jews all over the world. Next, God also declared that in the future Israel would be gathered from the east, west, north, and south, "from the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 43:5-7). We should note that in the context of this promise, God called Israel His "chosen" (vv. 10, 20).

". . . Just as Jesus indicated that the gathering of His elect from the four directions of the world will take place in conjunction with "a great trumpet" (literal translation of the Greek text of Matthew 24:21), so

Isaiah 27:13 teaches that the scattered children of Israel will be gathered to their homeland in conjunction with the blowing of "a great trumpet" (literal translation of the Hebrew). . . ."

What Jesus describes in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 is the Jewish ingathering that will fulfill the prophetic aspects of the Feast of Trumpets for the nation of Israel. In fact, a prayer for this regathering of the children of Israel appears to this day in the Jewish Daily Prayer Book. It is quite clear that since the church is not mentioned in Matthew 24, then verse 31 cannot be a reference to the rapture of the church.

Luke 21:28 But when these things begin to happen, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Notice the believers are to stand up and raise their heads when these things *begin* to happen. Jesus is telling Jewish believers in the Tribulation that when these things he's told them of start to happen, they should realize that their redemption is near. And this is obviously physical redemption, not spiritual. Believers are redeemed for all eternity the moment they trust Christ, because of what He did at Calvary.

Keep in mind that all of these signs so far in this chapter are signs of the Tribulation and 2nd Coming, not the Rapture. But, of course, if we see the signs indicating that the Tribulation is near, that means the Rapture is even closer. We don't know when the Rapture will occur, it could be just before the Tribulation, or long before the Tribulation.

Five Parables

Jesus has now completed His discourse about the tribulation and second coming, and He now gives five parables that drive home the point of what He had just taught. All of these parables relate to Christ's teaching in the previous section of Matthew 24:4-31 and do not introduce a new theme in His teaching.

These five parables are important lessons that relate to Israel. In fact, I would go so far as to say that all the parables in the New Testament relate directly to Israel. Often they have to do with Israel's rejection of Jesus as their Messiah and speak of consequences that come from that. Christ told His disciples in Matthew 13:10-17 that He would speak to "this people" (Israel) in order to blind them to the truth because of their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. But believers can come to understand the meaning of His parables because we are receptive of the revelation of Christ, and the Holy Spirit reveals it to us.

The parables within the Olivet Discourse, when they speak of a coming, all relate to the second coming and not the rapture of the church. This is true because the entire Olivet Discourse was given to Israel and relates to her tribulation and Christ's return at the end of that period. Truths related to the rapture of the church are revealed exclusively in the New Testament Epistles, which were written specifically for the purpose of explaining the intent and nature of the Church age. The only exception to this is Christ's initial unveiling of the church's hope in the Upper Room Discourse (John 14:1-3) shortly before His death.

Matthew 24:32-35 "Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. (33) So also you, when you see all these things, know that he is near, right at the door. (34) I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (35) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Luke 21:29-33 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the other trees. (30) When they sprout leaves, you see for yourselves and know that summer is now near. (31) So also you, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. (32) I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these

things take place. (33) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

(Also Mark 13:28-32) These verses have often been misused to try to date the Rapture or the 2nd coming of Christ. The fig tree is often used to represent the reestablishment of Israel in 1948, and the term generation is taken to mean 40 years. Many people tried to predict that the Rapture would happen by 1988. I'm pretty sure Jesus didn't come in 1988, so there were many people disappointed, the ones who taught it lost much credibility, and it gave scoffers lots of ammunition to ridicule those crazy prophecy nuts. But Jesus never intended what He said to be used in such a way. This is date-setting, and the Bible clearly teaches that we're not to do that.

Nowhere in the Bible is it taught that a generation is 40 years. Actually the only place we have a specific time for a generation is in the Israelites captivity in Egypt for 400 years. The Bible says they came out after 4 generations, so that's 100 years per generation. But usually the Bible uses the term generation like we do today, not in terms of a period of time, but in terms of comparison with other generations, like "my generation", as opposed to "my parent's generation".

The controlling context of "this generation" is "all these things." Since Jesus is giving an extended discussion of future events, you have to consider the nature of "all these things" prophesied in verses 4 through 31 to know what generation Christ is speaking of. Since "all these things" did not take place in the first century then the generation that Christ speaks of must be future. Christ is saying that the generation that sees "all these things" happen will not cease to exist until all the events of the future tribulation are fulfilled. Christ is not ultimately speaking to His disciples here, but to the generation to whom the signs of Matthew 24 will be given.

The other mistake made is the interpretation of the fig tree. Nowhere in this chapter is the reestablishment of Israel mentioned. Also, the fig tree is not a symbol for Israel. The normal symbol for Israel is the vine. If you look at the Luke passage, it is very clear that the use of the fig tree is literal, it doesn't represent anything but a fig tree. Jesus is just using it as an illustration. When these things Jesus has mentioned start to occur, we know that Christ's return is near, just as when trees sprout leaves, we know that summer is not far away. These verses are meant to be a comfort to people, to encourage those living in the end times, especially the Jews, that they will not be annihilated.

Notice the last verses of these two passages. "Heaven and earth WILL pass away." We'll speak more of this when we get to the end of Revelation, but it seems obvious from this passage that the universe – not just the earth, is going to be remade. Jesus' words, though, will never pass away.

Matthew 24:36 "But as for that day and hour no one knows it – not even the angels in heaven – except the Father alone.

What does this mean in light of the fact that Matthew 24:4–31 is speaking of the tribulation period that is seven 360-day years, divided at the midpoint by the abomination of desolation? In other words, alert believers in the tribulation should be able to know the exact day of the second coming. I believe that believers in the tribulation will definitely be able to know the day of Christ's return. This passage does not say that no man will ever know. Jesus did not say that. I agree with most commentators that this passage is saying that in His incarnation as the Son of Man it was not given to Him (or revealed to Him) the time of His return. I am sure that He knew the day and the hour when He returned to heaven.

This does not mean that those at a future time would not be able to know when He was returning. Yeager says: "The *thought of the context is that at the time that Jesus spoke this to His disciples, and even yet*

now, at the current writing, nobody knows the day and the hour.” It is not until after the rapture, when one is in the tribulation that God’s prophetic clock will resume ticking. For believers living during that time they will be able to know at least the day when Christ will return to planet earth.

Matthew 24:37-39 For just like the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. (38) For in those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark. (39) And they knew nothing until the flood came and took them all away. It will be the same at the coming of the Son of Man.

Daniel Harrington says, “The point of the comparison between the days of Noah and the coming of the Son of Man is the unexpectedness of the crisis. . . . So unexpected was the flood that people did not recognize it until it had already come upon them.” The New Testament also compares the second coming to the flood in Noah’s days in Luke 17:26–27, and 2 Peter 2:4–11, as well as to other judgments such as the days of Lot in Luke 17:28–30. The central point found in these passages is that unbelievers were not prepared for God’s judgment.

The Greek word used here for “eating”, trogo, is not the word normally used. It appears to be implying luxurious living. The unprepared of that day will be so absorbed in pleasing themselves, or said another way, chomping on food, that they miss the fact that they are living in extraordinary times that should make them abandon the normal routines of life.

Alfred Plummer also explains as follows: “The special point of the analogy is not that the generation that was swept away by the Flood was exceptionally wicked; none of the occupations mentioned are sinful; but that it was so absorbed in its worldly pursuits that it paid no attention to solemn warnings. Instead of saying: “It is certain to come; therefore we must make preparation and be always on the watch,” they said: “No one knows when it will come; therefore there is no need to trouble oneself about it yet. Other matters are much more urgent.”

The events that Christ had just described (the Tribulation in 24:4–31) should cause concern about God’s plan for history. Instead, the unbelievers want to continue their own pursuits of their daily routines. Robert Govett explains: “The love of the world is displayed by men’s being given over to eating and drinking. Had they believed the message of wrath just about to come, they would have fasted and wept.” A desire for the status quo shows that you are unprepared.

While eating and drinking relates to daily unpreparedness, marrying and giving in marriage shows unpreparedness concerning one’s long-range perspective. Marriage, while being an institution ordained of God, is good in-and-of itself, but the point here is that one should not be doing long-ranged planning while being unprepared for impending judgment. Meyer tells us that it is “descriptive of a mode of life without concern, and without any foreboding of an impending catastrophe.” Just as it would make no sense to plan marriage in the days of Noah leading up to the Flood, if one was unprepared to face God’s judgment, in the same way, it makes no sense to plan for marriage in the face of the events of the tribulation that will lead up to the second coming.

In the days of Noah, Noah had been preaching about the coming judgment of God (2 Peter 2:5), yet no one, other than Noah’s family paid attention to his message. Instead, they went about business as usual, ignoring the warnings of God’s Word. Govett captures the sense well in the following: *Hence these pursuits are spoken of, not as evil in themselves, but as they practically give the lie to the warnings of God. These are only reasonable, so long as the present scene is to go on as it is. The accumulating property, when both life, property, and posterity are to be destroyed, is folly.*”

Probably the most sobering statement in this passage is that “they did not understand.” They did not put two and two together, Jesus said, “until the flood came and took them all away.” Actually, verse 39 does say that the unbelievers did come to understand these things. But, their understanding did not come until the flood came and took them all away. This is one of the many things that separate believers from unbelievers.

Believers accept God’s Word before an event occurs because they trust Him and His prophetic word. On the other hand, an unbeliever has to be shown these things through experience, in this case a very bad experience. What about you? Do you trust God and His Word because He says it, or are you one who has to be shown things from experience? There is a big difference between the two.

Matthew 24:40-42 Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one left. (41) There will be two women grinding grain with a mill; one will be taken and one left. (42) "Therefore stay alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

In the early 1970s, probably the most popular song in the “Jesus movement,” was “I Wish We’d All Been Ready,” by Larry Norman, one of my favorite Christian artists, who went home to be with the Lord just last year. This song about the rapture includes the following lines: A man and wife asleep in bed. She hears a noise and turns her head, he's gone. I wish we'd all been ready. Two men walking up a hill. One disappears and one's left standing still. I wish we'd all been ready. While I always liked this song, I do not think Matthew 24:40-42 (compare Luke 17:34-37) is about the rapture, instead, Christ is speaking about His second coming.

ONE WILL BE TAKEN

In this parable, there will be a separation where one person will be taken and the other left behind. Also, in context, it is clear that one is a believer and the other is not. This is a clear separation process. The question is who is taken and who is left behind. Those who hold to pretribulationism have argued both ways on this issue. Is this the believer being taken and the unbeliever left behind, or just the reverse, where the unbeliever is taken away and the believer is left to enter the kingdom? I believe it is the unbeliever who is taken away in judgment.

There are good teachers that I respect on both sides of this issue, and I myself used to consider this a rapture passage, but as I have studied it more I have come to believe that it is not. However, let’s look at both sides and you can make up your own mind.

Reasons usually given for being a Rapture Passage:

1. Only the Father knows when it will happen – it’s not known by anyone else, it is hidden. This would seem to suggest that Jesus is talking about the Rapture, because we know when the 2nd Coming will occur, exactly seven years after the Tribulation begins – and 3 1/2 years (1260 days) after the Abomination of Desolation.
2. It just sounds like the rapture, with one being taken, and the other being left behind.
3. It seems that things will be somewhat normal on earth when this event happens, and that won’t be the case just before the 2nd Coming.
4. Jesus commands believers to watch, be alert. That sounds like the Rapture, because we don’t know when it will happen.

Reasons for being a 2nd Coming Passage:

1. The context of the preceding verses, as we have discussed, is the 2nd coming at the end of the Tribulation. (Matthew 24:29-30). It doesn't seem like Jesus would suddenly switch from focusing on His 2nd coming to talk about the Rapture.
2. The chronology doesn't work if it is the Rapture that is spoken of here. Verses 9-28 are about the Tribulation, and then verse 29 says "Immediately after the Tribulation...". Then verse 30 and following are about the 2nd coming. It doesn't make sense chronologically that the Rapture would come after that.
3. It appears that verses 40-41 are illustrating what was described in verses 36-39, that those who were not prepared in the days of Noah were taken away, in judgment, by the flood. Verse 39 ends by saying, "so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." Clearly this verse is about unbelievers being taken away in the judgment of the flood. Then, verses 40-41 drive that point home by giving a couple examples of the coming separation that will occur at this time of judgment.
4. Another reason to see verses 40-41 as illustrating ones who are taken in judgment is the parallel passage found in Luke 17:24-37. Christ speaks of the coming of the Son of Man being just like the days of Noah and Lot. In both illustrations it was the wicked one who was taken in judgment. Luke 17:27 says, "the flood came and destroyed them all." Verses 28 and 29 say: "It was the same as happened in the days of Lot . . . and destroyed them all." Verses 34-36 gives three illustrations of the separation of believers and unbelievers. Then the following question is asked by the disciples: "Where Lord?" This question means where are the unbelievers taken? Jesus answers: "**Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered.**" Anyone would be able to see where a dead body is because of the vultures hovering above (Rev. 19:17-21). That certainly sounds like the ones taken are taken to judgment.

Two classes were living in Noah's day. The ones who were unbelieving and these were swept away by the divine judgment were one class, and the other class was Noah and his house, and he and his own were left and not destroyed by the judgment. It will be so again in the coming of the Son of Man. The unbelievers will be taken away in the day of judgment and wrath; the others will be left on the earth to receive and enjoy the blessings of the coming age and enter into the Kingdom, which will then be established.

So, if this is the 2nd coming and not the Rapture, why is Jesus telling us to be alert? Luke expands a little more on the idea of being alert:

Luke 21:34-36 "But be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day close down upon you suddenly like a trap. (35) For it will overtake all who live on the face of the whole earth. (36) But stay alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that must happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Remember that Jesus is speaking to Jewish believers who will be living during the Tribulation, although this will be good advice for Gentile believers as well. It seems to me that Jesus is telling them to pay attention to what's going on during that time; be alert and in constant prayer. Make sure you don't get distracted by the world and forget that I am coming! The believers will know when He is coming if they stay alert and watch for the events and signs that Jesus has given us. I think Paul makes this even more clear in 1 Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 5:2-4 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. (3) While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. (4) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would

overtake you like a thief;

Paul is not speaking of the Rapture, the “Day of the Lord is the Tribulation period leading up to and including the 2nd Coming of Christ. True believers will be prepared for the thief in the night and it will not be a surprise.

Unbelievers are never alert to what God is doing. That is the point! Not whether the world is experiencing a time of disruption and chaos, but whether one is listening to God’s Word and is prepared. Believers, at this time will be alert, while unbelievers, as always, will not be.

Jesus now gives a series of parables. The point of all of these is watchfulness and readiness. These parables illustrate the difference between believers and unbelievers – those who are ready for Christ’s coming, and those who are not.

Mark 13:33-37 Watch out! Stay alert! For you do not know when the time will come. (34) It is like a man going on a journey. He left his house and put his slaves in charge, assigning to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to stay alert. (35) Stay alert, then, because you do not know when the owner of the house will return – whether during evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn – (36) or else he might find you asleep when he returns suddenly. (37) What I say to you I say to everyone: Stay alert!"

The main point of this is to watch for the Lord’s return, to be ready. Of course, readiness is simply being saved. If you have accepted the salvation offered by Christ, then you are ready, plain and simple. Only those who have salvation can “watch”.

Matthew 24:43-44 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have been alert and would not have let his house be broken into. (44) Therefore you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Again the emphasis on being ready. Believers will be watching because they know that a thief is coming during this time. So, they are prepared and alert. Who is the “you also” in verse 44? I believe it refers to the Jewish remnant. Jesus has been using the “you” throughout the Olivet Discourse as a reference to the Jewish people. Since He clearly has in mind believers in verse 44, since only believers will be alert, then this passage refers specifically to the Jewish remnant during the tribulation. “*This warning will be understood and heeded by the Jewish remnant, to which it is addressed,*” declares Arno Gaebelein. “*They are to watch for the Son of Man; the church is to wait for her Lord.*” Israel was not prepared and ready when Christ came the first time, but the remnant will be prepared and ready when He arrives the second time.

The Parable of the Faithful Servant and Evil Servant.

Matthew 24:45-51 "Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom the master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their food at the proper time? (46) Blessed is that slave whom the master finds at work when he comes. (47) I tell you the truth, the master will put him in charge of all his possessions. (48) But if that evil slave should say to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' (49) and he begins to beat his fellow slaves and to eat and drink with drunkards, (50) then the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not foresee, (51) and will cut him in two, and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where

there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The emphasis of this parable is that we should be working while we're watching for His coming. Jesus wants us to understand that watching isn't just sitting around looking at the sky. The true believers, when Jesus comes, will be found working, the unbelievers will not be working (for the Lord).

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. (2) Five of the virgins were foolish, and five were wise. (3) When the foolish ones took their lamps, they did not take extra olive oil with them. (4) But the wise ones took flasks of olive oil with their lamps. (5) When the bridegroom was delayed a long time, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. (6) But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look, the bridegroom is here! Come out to meet him.' (7) Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. (8) The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.' (9) 'No,' they replied. 'There won't be enough for you and for us. Go instead to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' (10) But while they had gone to buy it, the bridegroom arrived, and those who were ready went inside with him to the wedding banquet. Then the door was shut. (11) Later, the other virgins came too, saying, 'Lord, lord! Let us in!' (12) But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I do not know you!' (13) Therefore stay alert, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Some believe the ten virgins represent Israel as a whole, both the ones who are prepared for Christ's coming and the ones who are not. But it is not really necessary to believe that the virgins in this parable are Israel or the Church (notice the bride is not mentioned anywhere in this passage) either one. Jesus is just using them to make a point. The ones who are wise, who are ready for the bridegroom's return, are the believers. The foolish virgins, who are not ready and not watching, are unbelievers. Some try to make every detail in this parable represent something, but don't try to read too much into it. It is again just trying to emphasize watchfulness and readiness. Some also try to use this parable to demonstrate that you can lose your salvation, but that again is trying to read something into the text that is not there.

Then there's a few that use this parable to support a "Partial Rapture" position. This view teaches that the rapture occurs before the tribulation, but only "spiritual" Christians will be taken, while other Christians will remain through the tribulation. They also believe that multiple raptures will occur throughout the seven-year tribulation period. But this parable, as in the rest of Christ's discourse, is not about the Rapture at all, but about His 2nd coming. There is no scriptural support at all for a partial rapture. The Bible is clear that you are either in Christ (saved) or not, there is no in-between.

The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30 "For it is like a man going on a journey, who summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them. (15) To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. (16) The one who had received five talents went off right away and put his money to work and gained five more. (17) In the same way, the one who had two gained two more. (18) But the one who had received one talent went out and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money in it. (19) After a long time, the master of those slaves came and settled his accounts with them. (20) The one who had received the five talents came and brought five more, saying, 'Sir, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' (21) His master answered, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You have been faithful in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the

joy of your master.' (22) The one with the two talents also came and said, 'Sir, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more.' (23) His master answered, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.' (24) Then the one who had received the one talent came and said, 'Sir, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed, (25) so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.' (26) But his master answered, 'Evil and lazy slave! So you knew that I harvest where I didn't sow and gather where I didn't scatter? (27) Then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received my money back with interest! (28) Therefore take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten. (29) For the one who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. (30) And throw that worthless slave into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This parable is often preached on today without any context of it's meaning relating to Israel and Christ's return. Jesus is reemphasizing that we should keep on working while waiting for Christ to return. Like previous parables in Christ's Discourse, this one deals with the issue of faithfulness. How will a true son of the kingdom act during the time of his master's absence? Will he be faithful to his lord or will he be a worthless servant? The servants were evaluated for how they carried out their responsibilities during the absence of their master. Upon the return of the master, those servants that were faithful in the execution of their duties were rewarded with greater responsibility and wealth during the future reign of the king. "So here the heirs of the kingdom will receive greater blessing, while the ones who do not inherit it will be shut off from even an opportunity for entrance," notes Dr. Toussaint. "Those who do receive rewards will be rewarded according to their faithfulness and not the measure of their work."

The ones in the parable who worked while waiting for the master to return represent believers, the one who did nothing represents unbelievers. Actually the unbeliever cannot work for the Lord, because he has no faith. The application of these parables can be made to both the Rapture and the 2nd coming. The only way you can be working and serving the Lord while waiting for the Lord's return is to accept Christ now, not just before He returns.

All of these parables are a prelude to the final section of Matthew 25, which is about the coming judgment of the Gentiles.

Matthew 25:31-46 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. (32) All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (34) Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' (37) Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' (40) And the king will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me.' (41) "Then he will say to those on

his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels! (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. (43) I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' (44) Then they too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not give you whatever you needed?' (45) Then he will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.' (46) And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

"The nations" reveals this judgment is about the living Gentiles after His second coming ("his glorious throne"). Jesus will be judging the nations based on how they treated the Jews ("brothers and sisters of mine") during the Tribulation. Joel 3:1-3 tells us where this takes place:

Joel 3:1-3 For look! In those days and at that time I will return the exiles to Judah and Jerusalem. (2) Then I will gather all the nations, and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. I will enter into judgment against them there concerning my people Israel who are my inheritance, whom they scattered among the nations. They partitioned my land, (3) and they cast lots for my people. They traded a boy for a prostitute; they sold a little girl for wine so they could drink.

So it will take place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is outside of Jerusalem, between the old city walls and the Mount of Olives. It will be an individual judgment, because the Greek word translated as "nations" in verse Matthew 25:32 has the primary meaning of Gentiles, and that's how it's translated elsewhere in the New Testament. All the Gentiles who will survive the Tribulation and the war of Armageddon will be gathered into this valley, and separated one by one to the right and left. The basis of the judgment is anti-Semitism or pro-Semitism. Some have tried to make the term "brothers and sisters of mine" to mean all saints, Jews and Gentiles, but that would make the passage meaningless. There are three specific groups mentioned here. There are the sheep Gentiles, the goat Gentiles, and the "brothers and sisters of mine". If the "brothers and sisters of mine" are Gentile believers, then who are the Gentile sheep? Also, the Joel passage emphasizes the treatment of God's "people Israel who are my inheritance."

Now, don't misconstrue what I'm saying here. This passage is clearly teaching that the sheep are righteous, but are they saved because of their treatment of the Jews? That can't be, because that would be salvation by works. Salvation is only through Christ by the grace of God. True believers in the Tribulation (the sheep), when the antichrist persecutes the Jews, will do what they can do to help the Jews. They proved their faith by how they treated the Jews. They are the ones who were watching, working, and were ready for Christ's return, as He commanded in the other parables. The goats are unbelievers who went along with the antichrist in his program to persecute the Jews, or did nothing. That showed their lack of faith. They represent the ones in the parables who were not watching, working, and were not ready for Christ to return. These people will be killed and sent to hell, excluded from the Kingdom (vs. 46).

The sheep are the saved Gentile believers who will populate the earth during the Millennial Kingdom, and eventually enter into eternal life in the eternal state.

This was the last great discourse given by Jesus, and the conclusion of His role of prophet. He then transitions into His role of priest, as He offered a sacrifice with His own blood, and then began to function as our high priest.

The words here for us are to be sure we have accepted Christ's offer of salvation ("be ready"), and to watch

for His coming while we work for His Kingdom!

To close this lesson, I will borrow from the end of the book of Revelation, which we will begin in just two more weeks:

Revelation 22:20-21 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Next week: The Rapture of the Church!