

The End Times According to Jesus – Part 3

By Jack Kelley



No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. (Matt 24:36-41)

Don't let this passage confuse you, like it has so many others. Note that the first sentence reads, "No one knows about that day or hour." Plenty of people on Earth at the End of the Age will know when the Lord is due to return. Remember, both the kick-off event and duration of the Great Tribulation are clearly and unmistakably described. On the day when the Antichrist stands in the Temple and declares that he's God, they'll just have to count off 1260 days and look up into the sky. First, they'll see the Sun and Moon turn dark and stars fall out of the sky. (Matt 24:29) That's the signal that the Great Tribulation has ended. Then the Lord's sign will appear in the sky. (Matt. 24:30) And finally, they'll see the Lord Himself coming in the clouds in power and glory. But the period of time required for this sequence to unfold is anybody's guess, and that's what this passage says.

Also, the Lord compared the time of His return to the time of Noah, so we should expect to find similar circumstances leading up to these two events. And we do. Both involve worldwide judgments that occur at a time when most people are caught unaware. Although in both cases the people of Earth are given repeated warnings of what's coming, those warnings are ignored by almost everyone. In the case of the Great Flood, judgment came in the form of rain, which fell on the Earth for 40 days and 40 nights. In the case of the Great Tribulation 21 separate judgment events unfold over a 3 ½ year period. This is why although only eight people survived the Flood, the Lord warned that the Great Tribulation would be the worst time of judgment in human history.

Here's where the second hint of a body of believers in Heaven awaiting His return appears, and this one's even more vague than the first one, back in Matt. 24:31. You see, both the Great Flood and the Great Tribulation have three components: judgment, preservation through judgment, and escape from judgment. In the Days of Noah, the unbelievers were judged, Noah's family was preserved through the judgment, and Enoch escaped it altogether. At the End of the Age, unbelievers are judged, the remnant of Israel is preserved through the judgment, and the Church escapes from judgment.

Now let's consider those words taken and left in Matt. 24:40-41 a little more closely. The Greek word translated taken literally means received, and the one translated left means put away. They refer to the disposition of those remaining alive on Earth when the Lord returns-the Tribulation Survivors. Those who've become believers will be received into the Kingdom, and those who haven't will be put away into the place prepared for the devil and his angels. Folks who try to find the Rapture of the Church in these words are simply looking in the wrong place.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. (Matt. 24:42-44)

This warning is given primarily to those Tribulation Survivors who are not believers. As I stated above, once the Great Tribulation begins, all believers on Earth will know when it will end. The sequence of events that follow is also clear. The only thing they won't know is the exact day and hour of His Coming.

No, this warning is to the undecided, who aren't counting up the prophecies being fulfilled around them, and don't realize that if they waver too long, they'll be taken by surprise and miss their last chance at salvation. Don't get me wrong, they'll be only too aware of the massive disruptions to their lives caused by the End Times judgments. They just won't understand what's behind it all. Remember, confusion and deception will be the order of the day.

Think about the analogy of the thief. As the Lord returns unexpectedly (like a thief), He'll be breaking into a place the enemy thinks belongs to him and his followers. "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil 3:19-20) He won't be coming as a thief in the night as far as believers are concerned, stealthily breaking into their world. They'll be eagerly watching and impatiently waiting, counting the days, praying for His coming, longing for Him to take them home to be with Him forever.

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 24:45-51)

The worst punishment is reserved for those in charge, heads of organized religions who, instead of "feeding" their flocks with the Bread of Life and encouraging them with the promise of His return, confuse and deceive them with false doctrines, and deny the validity of God's prophetic Word. By their actions, they demonstrate the depravity of their own souls, showing themselves to be devoid of the Holy Spirit and worthy of punishment. Knowingly or not, they're infiltrators from the enemy's camp, like tares among the wheat.

Having forsaken the truth, they no longer watch for the Lord's return, ignoring the obvious fulfillment of prophecy all around them and ridiculing those whose child-like faith sustains them. These "Christian Atheists" as they sometimes call themselves, are worse than the enemy because they look and talk like friends. They're like the one John describes as appearing to have the authority of the Lamb but who speaks the words of the Dragon (Rev. 13:11). They will be also be assigned to the place prepared for the devil and his angels.

But the Lord will elevate to a place of authority in His Kingdom those who keep the word of God through the intense hardship and persecution of the times, and teach sound doctrine to the flocks entrusted to them. Just as some among the common folk alive when the Lord returns will be received into the Kingdom with honors, while others are put away in everlasting shame and contempt, so it will be with their leaders.

In chapter 25, Matthew recounts two parables, the Ten Bridesmaids and the Talents, and a warning to Tribulation Survivors, the Sheep and Goat judgment. In all three, the emphasis is on separating the faithful from the unfaithful following the Lord's return. The faithful will be received with honors into His Kingdom, while the unfaithful are

left out to be judged. Since all three include a reference to time that places them in the aftermath of His 2nd coming, the entire chapter expands on the "taken and left" statement of Matt. 24:40-41.

Because there's been so much confusion, let's make this perfectly clear. Of all the views on the timing of the Rapture of the Church, none place it after the 2nd coming. But look how clearly that time frame is indicated in each portion of Matt. 25. Backing up a little to establish the order, we read;

"Immediately after the distress of those days," signs in the Heavens after the end of the Great Tribulation (Matt 24:29)

"At that time," His appearance in the sky after the end of the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:30)

"No one knows about that day," the day of the 2nd Coming, after the Tribulation (Matt: 24:36)

"At that time," connecting the parable of the ten virgins to the 2nd Coming (Matt 25:1)

"Again," referring to the same time frame in beginning the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14)

"When the Son of Man comes in all His Glory," beginning the Sheep and Goat judgment which describes the judgment of Tribulation Survivors after the 2nd Coming (Matt 25:31).

As you see, they all occur chronologically after the Tribulation and 2nd Coming, and all describe the situation on Earth following the Lord's return. Therefore none of them can be used to describe the Rapture or any other aspect of the Church. The Church Age ends with the Rapture and that occurs before the Second Coming.

It's clear that the only questions the Lord answered in the Olivet Discourse are the three the disciples asked. "When will these things happen? What will be the sign of your Coming and of the End of the Age?" Having chosen to delay the announcement of the Rapture of the Church until nearly 20 years after His resurrection, the Lord neither taught it to His disciples nor, as we've seen, did He address it in the Olivet Discourse. No, the Olivet Discourse was a summary of Jewish Eschatology given to Jews in Israel, not intended for the Church.

So in coming to the end of our commentary, we're left with one big unanswered question. Why didn't the Lord teach something as important as the Doctrine of the Rapture to his disciples somewhere else in the Gospels? Obviously, there's a good reason, and I'll explain it next time. That way we'll keep something intended exclusively for the Church separate from this very Jewish passage of Scripture we call the Olivet Discourse. In the meantime, if you listen closely, you can almost hear the footsteps of the Messiah.

Jack Kelley