

# **Are Church Age Saints in the Olivet Discourse?**

**Matthew 24:1 - 25:46**

**By Cooper P Abrams III  
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Are Church Age Saints in the Olivet Discourse? - Matthew 24-25

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Address All Inquiries to:

**Cooper P. Abrams, III**  
**Bible Truth Web Site**  
**<http://bible-truth.org>**  
**Tremonton, Utah 84337**  
**435 452-1716**  
**[cpabrams3@gmail.com](mailto:cpabrams3@gmail.com)**

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# **Are Church Age Saints in the Olivet Discourse?**

## **Matthew 24:1 - 25:46**

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The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24-25, without question, is one of the most misunderstood and subsequently one of the most misinterpreted passages in the New Testament. Often overlooked is the subject of the discourse in which Jesus was asking the questions of His disciples about the end of the age. The discord has come from not understanding what age the Lord was describing. The result has brought forth various eschatological views such as the Pre-Wrath, Mid, and Post Tribulational and a host of other contradictory theories that have caused great confusion among today's Christians.

The heart of the problem is that interpreters do not apply sound rules of hermeneutics, make the serious mistake of mixing God's plans, and purpose for Israel with that of the Christians in this the Church Age.

This book is a verse by verse, careful exegetical examination of the Olivet Discourse that shows that Church Age saints are not present during the Tribulation. Further, it demonstrates that the New Testament teaches the Pre-Tribulational rapture of Christians in this dispensation.

All believers of all ages are saved the same way by faith in the Jesus Christ. The Old Testament saints were looking forward to His redemptive work, and Church Age believers are looking back. Yet, God makes a distinction between how He works with Israel and Christians in this age. God has a different plan and purpose for Christians in this age that is distinct from the Old Testament. God is not finished with His chosen people and the Old Testament dispensation. If this truth is ignored and not applied in the interpretation of Matthew 24-25, the results will produce a misconception of the events of the end times.

The Lord's Olivet discourse deals with the end of the Old Testament age or dispensation in which Jesus lived. All four Gospels record events that occurred during the Old Testament period. That dispensation is not completed, but was put on hold temporarily until the time of the Gentiles is finished. (Luke 21:24) This vital truth must be considered in interpreting the Lord's message on the Mount of Olives. God will once again start His prophetic clock and finish the 490 years of Daniel's prophecy in the coming 70<sup>th</sup> week that is the coming seven year Tribulation.

It is a common mistake in interpreting Matthew 24-25 to conclude that this passage is written to describe the end time events of the present church age. These events are actually a description of the seven year Tribulation; they apply them as being a part of the current Church Age.

## **False Views Espoused From a False Interpretation**

For example, because of the similarities of Matthew 24:40-41 with the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, some have concluded that this is the rapture of believers in the Church Age and places it within the Tribulation. They then preclude that Christians will be on earth and will be present through part of the Tribulation. This interpretation causes them to seek to establish the rapture in the chronology of the seven years. The offshoot of this has been a Pre-Wrath, Mid, Post Tribulation rapture. Ignoring the sound biblical principles of interpretation causes great confusion concerning Christ's coming for Christians at the rapture, and with His Second coming at the end of the Tribulation. The details of the rapture and the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation are clearly different.

Other related views espoused are the Post and Amillennialism based on their false understanding of Matthew 25:31-46. Both of these views teach there will not be a literal 1000 year reign of Christ in the Kingdom as Revelation 20:4-6 describes. Further, they discount God's promises of the Kingdom to Israel. They assume this passage to be describing a single end time judgment with the saved or sheep on one side and the lost or goats on the other referred which is to as the "Sheep and Goat Judgment." This interpretation does not take into account the BEMA judgment of 1 Corinthian 3:10-15 for Church Age saints and the final judgment of the unsaved at the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. The result of these false views has caused a shadow over the Lord's discourse and biblical eschatology.

## **The Purpose of This Paper**

The following is presented as a response to explain hermetically that these are incorrect views and Matthew 24-25 supports the Pre-Tribulation rapture and Pre-Millennial view of eschatology. A correct interpretation will show that the Church Age is not in view in the Christ's Olivet Discourse.

The context of the Olivet Discourse is established by Matthew 24:3. It is critical in interpreting a passage of God's word accurately one must understand the context in which a statement is made. The context would include who is being addressed; when the address is made; the subject of the discourse; and the historical and cultural situation at that time.

The disciples knew nothing of this present Church Age, and their questions were addressing the end times as related to Israel. Jesus in Matthew 16:18-19 had prophesied of the establishment of His *ekklesia*, but did not give them further details until after His resurrection as Acts 1:1-8 records.

Clearly, on the minds of His disciples was the end of their present period of the Old Testament when the Messiah would restore the Kingdom to Israel. This was why the disciples asked their questions. To understand this, one must consider the preceding events the disciples witnessed.

They had seen Jesus weeping over Jerusalem as Luke 19:41-44 recorded in which He predicted the 70 A.D. destruction of the city. They witnessed His purging of the Temple of the money changers. They repeatedly had heard His teaching and parables and had witnessed the violent response of the chief priests and scribes. Jesus had spoken of the alarming details of the destruction of the Temple and coming events.

Luke then records a shorter but parallel account of the Olivet Discourse. Luke 21:5-7 states the context of the disciple's questions. *"And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?"* (Luke 21:5-7)

Jesus had consistently presented Himself to be the promised Messiah, and the disciples were aware of who he was. They heard Him affirm He was the Messiah to the Samaritan woman. *"The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiahs cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he."* (John 4:25-26)

Mark records that Jesus attested to this at his trial before the high priest, *"But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again, the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."* (Mark 14:61-62)

## **The Two Questions Answered By the Lord in Matthew 24-25**

The disciples asked the Lord the two specific questions, ". . . *what shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world.*" The word, "coming" is *parousia*, and basically means, "presence" or "arrival." (See 1 Cor. 16:17, 2 Cor. 7:7) The "*parousia*" refers to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, at the end of the age. Jesus will come and purge the earth of sinners and then fifty days later begins the Millennium, which is the promised Kingdom to Israel.

The word translated "*world*" is the word *aion*, and means "age or a period of time." The question the disciples asked was, "*Tell us, when these things shall be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*" The age when Christ preached the Olivet Discourse was the period just prior to His crucifixion, which was the Old Testament dispensation. This is the period Jesus was explaining. The present dispensation of the Church Age had not begun. The "age" refers to Israel's history and the end of the Old Testament dispensation. This is not referring to the coming rapture of the Church Age saints in this the "*ekklesia aion*" (Church Age) which He instituted forty days later after His ascension as Acts 2 records.

In understanding Jesus' discourse, we need to determine and be clear as to what "age" He was referring. To interpret properly the passage nothing must be "assumed" but the interpretation has to be based on the evidence in the discourse and on all pertinent scriptures.

The Old Testament period is stated as being 490 years in Daniel's prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. Note what Daniel stated, "*Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.*" (Daniel 9:24)

The Jews were in Babylon in captivity, and they were concerned about Israel's future and the fulfillment of God's promises to them. (V24) Daniel's prophecy was God's assurance that He was not finished with them and would accomplish His purpose for them. This prophecy stated that in 490 years, God would restore their Kingdom, and the Messiah would reign. This would end Israel's transgression, put an end their sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring everlasting righteousness. Daniel foretold the period would end with the vision and prophecy sealed, meaning accomplished, and the *most Holy*, the Messiah, would be anointed, referring to the Second Coming and His subsequent setting up of the Kingdom. All these events will end in the final days of the Old Testament dispensation, which is Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week.

The "age" the disciples were asking about was the end of the Old Testament period when God would restore Israel under their Messiah. Many falsely conclude that the age Jesus is talking about involves the Church Age, and that He was addressing New Testament believers. However, the context and statements Jesus made negate that being the case. The age He speaks of here is the end of the Old Testament dispensation, which is finalized at the end of the Seven Year Tribulation. The seven years will end the Old Testament dispensation with the Second Coming of Jesus the Messiah. Currently, today we are in an interval period that is our present Church Age, which is sandwiched in between the end of Daniel's 483 years and before Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week.

### **Christians in This Age Are the Body and Bride of Christ**

Clearly, Christians are not present or mentioned in the Tribulation events of Matthew 24-25, nor in Revelation 4-19. Christians in the present age relate to the seven years, but the discourse is not addressing them. Yes, an innumerable number of people will be saved during the Tribulation, which will include Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 24:14). However, these saved people will be the last of the Old Testament saints saved, and not Christians, who are the body of Christ. The New Testament repeatedly establishes this truth:

*"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."* (1 Corinthians 12:27)

*"For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body."* (1 Corinthians 12:14-20)

*"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."* (Romans 12:5)

*"Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."* (Ephesians 1:23)

*"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:"* (Ephesians 4:11-12)

*“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”* (Ephesians 5:30)

*“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.”* (Colossians 1:24)

*“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office.”* (Romans 12:4)

Israel is never referred to as Christ's body. The body of Christ is unique to the believers in this Church Age. Further, believers in this dispensation are referred to in Revelation as the Bride of Christ.

*“And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.”* (Revelation 21:9)

*“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”* (Revelation 22:17)

The rapture will end the present Church Age and when the seven year Tribulation begins God will once again begin His prophetic clock and finalized Daniel's 490 years. Nothing in the New Testament, when properly interpreted, can be understood as placing Christians of this dispensation within the Tribulation. The Tribulation is a Jewish event. However, many Gentiles will be saved during the period having believed on Jesus Christ.

Prophetically there is no prophecy given to Christians about the end of the Church Age. As will be shown, Christians are to be looking for the imminent return of the Savior and not signs.

## **The Events of the Seven Year Tribulation Are The End of the Old Testament Dispensation**

Matthew 24-25 addresses the events of the seven year Tribulation, which is the final seven years of Daniel's prophesy, and states that the Messiah would come and reign in power for 490 years. Jesus' ministry, as the Gospels record, was in the Old Testament dispensation. So far, in time only 483 years of Daniel's prophesy has transpired, which leaves the final seven years (Daniel's 70th Week) still future. During the 483<sup>rd</sup> year,

Daniel said the Messiah would be cut off, “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself. . .” (Daniel 9:26) Note the remainder of the verse and verse 27 describes the actions of the Antichrist that complete the 490 years.

Today the Old Testament dispensation is not completed, but it will be ended with the coming of the Messiah at the end of the last week. Thus, none of the statements in Matthew 24-25 refers to the Church Age or Church Age saints (Christians).

To help our understanding of these saints the following is from your author’s commentary on the Book of Revelation, Chapter 7:9-17

“John sees “. . . a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;” (Rev. 7:9) In this heavenly scene, the saints of God are praising the Lord with the angels, the elders, and the four beasts, who fall down before the Lord on their faces and worship Him. These together honor the Lord saying, “Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.” (Revelation 7:12)

Verse 13 records that one of the elders asks John, who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from. It is imperative that one understands fully what is the question he asked. The answer establishes the identity of this great multitude of saints in heaven who are serving the Lord before the throne.

The elder then identifies them, as Revelation 7:14 states, as those who come out of the great tribulation. Note the words “great tribulation” is not capitalized. “. . . These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The elder answers the question and states that they are those who come out of the great tribulation that has occurred on earth. The great tribulation the elder mentions refers to the persecution of the Antichrist. These Tribulation saints were slain, prior to this point in the Tribulation. In time, they are seen as Revelation 6:9-11 records, in heaven at the opening of the Fifth Seal.

“And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” (Revelation 6:10-11)

It must be understood that Revelation 7 is a parenthetical section added within the chronology of the Book of Revelation. This Chapter reveals the sealing of the 144,000 and explains further the details of what John saw in Chapter 6 of the saints who have been martyred up to this point in the Tribulation and who are in heaven at the throne of God. Chapter 7 does not move the timing of the events of this period forward, but explain what will be going on behind the scenes.

As stated earlier, these are not believers of the present Church Age. These are those saved and martyred since the beginning of the Tribulation and before the Fifth Seal. They cannot represent Church Age saints because all saints of this present age have not been martyred. Matthew 24:21 records this was not just ordinary tribulation or persecution. This phrase establishes the magnitude of the "great tribulation" as being ". . . *such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*" Revelation 7:14, specifically states, these saints came out of great tribulation. Not all believers in the Church Age have had to endure the "great tribulation." These saints are not Church Age Christians, but are in heaven; and surely died at the beginning of the seven years.

When John penned this Book, there were no chapter or verse divisions. It at first may appear that these are two different groups or times. Nevertheless, Chapter 7 is an extension of Chapter 6. This group is made up from many ethnic and geographical areas of the earth. They have "palms" in their hand, which may refer to the Feast of the Tabernacles when Israel rejoiced in the blessings of God. (Lev. 23:40-43) It more probably parallels Jesus' Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem when the Lord presented Himself as Israel's Messiah. (See John 12:13)

Note that these people are saved and their sins washed white in the blood of the Lamb as are all who believe in Jesus Christ. Revelation 7:16 indicates they had been thirsty and hungry while on earth, but were no longer, now being in heaven. This gives further indication that these lived in the first part of the Tribulation, as there will be a famine as Revelation 6:6-8 explains. The reference to relief from the heat of the sun may refer to the sun's powerful rays causing great distress on earth and possibly partly causing the famine. Revelation 7:17 makes it very clear, as terrible as the Tribulation had been, it was now over for them and these saints were now at rest through all eternity in the presence of God. God says He ". . . *shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*"

Think about those who still remain on earth. Most people, remaining alive on earth in these terrible times, will be rejecting Christ. It is my opinion that one can surmise from this passage that most people who are saved, come to Christ in the first half of the Tribulation. Those remaining, in spite of all they have seen God pouring wrath on the earth will be rejecting Him. They could be saved if they believed, but because of their sin and rebellion, they will suffer under the judgment and condemnation of their sin. Note Jesus' statement in John 3:19-20 "*And this is the condemnation; that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*" (John 3:19-20)

It is explained, "*Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.*" (Rev. 7:15) He makes it plain that the blessings they will receive are related to the coming Millennial reign of Christ that follows the Tribulation. In the Millennial temple, these Tribulation saints with Church Age saints will serve Christ continually both day and night. These and other passages of Scripture indicate that the saints of God will not be idle in the Kingdom of God, but will have specific duties and be used in carrying out the Kingdom. Paul said that Christians would judge angels. (1 Corinthians 6:3)

Because this event follows the calling of the 144,000, these are probably those won to the Lord by the Jewish evangelists and those who were saved after witnessing the rapture. Further, in verse 14, this is confirmed when John asks who are these rejoicing saints and is told they are the ones who came out of great tribulation. The grammatical structure of this phrase shows that for this great multitude of saint's salvation for them has been accomplished.

Their faith in the promises of God of salvation has borne its fruit, and they are now safe in heaven with the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

## **Israel Will Be Restored By God**

There is no question that the focus of Tribulation is a Jewish event when God brings the Jews home, restores Israel as a nation, establish them in their promised Kingdom. God's promises are sure:

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper P. Abrams, III, A Commentary of the Book of Revelation, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (<http://bible-truth.org/Revelation-Chapter 7.html>), 2013

*“Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.”* (Jeremiah 30:10-11)

*“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”* (Isaiah 11:11-12)

*“Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”* (Isaiah 43:4-7)

*“Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.”* (Jeremiah 16:14-15)

*“And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:”* (Romans 11:26)

Also, see: Jer. 23:3-8, 26:14, Eze. 11:16-17, 28:25-26, 34:12-14, 37:21-22, 39:25-29; Amos 9:11-15; Zech. 8:4-8.

Many have concluded that on May 14, 1948, Israel became a nation and this was fulfilled prophecy. However, as marvelous as was Israel once again becoming a nation, but what was created was a civil nation that does not serve God and that has not accepted their Messiah. The prophecy of Israel’s restoration is specific in that when God

restores and brings them back to their land they will be God's nations and serving Him. What has occurred today does not fulfill the prophecy of Israel's restoration.

The Jews in the beginning of the Tribulation will in mass return to Israel and they will begin to serve the Lord. This is seen in the rebuilding the Temple and the restoration of the temple sacrifices. Today that is not occurring, but it will in the seven year Tribulation. Clearly, God brings the Jews back to Israel and the Tribulation is God's final appeal to Israel to believe and receive Him as their Messiah. (See Eze. 37:1-28) Many will believe and endure the persecutions of the Antichrist and be martyred.

During the beginning of the Tribulation, the Jews will rebuild their temple, which will no doubt infuriate the Antichrist and Satan, whom he serves. (Eze. 37:26-17) The Antichrist will show contempt for God and the Jews and declaring himself a god. He will set his statue in the Holy of Holies, as did Antiochus Epiphanes as Daniel recorded, and require the Jews to worship him. (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15-22) In his rage, there will be wholesale murder of the Jews and all who worship Jesus Christ. These are the martyrs of Revelation 6-7.

Note that God will restore the Temple worship, and save a remnant of the Jews who will not be killed, and who will populate the earth during the Millennium. (Isa. 10:21-22, 11:11) The coming seven year Tribulation will end with the completion of Daniel's prophecy of 490 with the coming of the Messiah and His setting up His kingdom. Thus, the end of the seven year Tribulation will end the Old Testament dispensation that was postponed by God when Israel rejected Him as their Messiah at His first coming.

## **God Will Give Israel Their Promised Kingdom**

At His Second Coming, the Lord will then fulfill His promises to the nation of Israel in what is referred to as the Kingdom which we know is the coming Millennium (1000 year reign of Christ - Revelation 20:6). During the Tribulation, God purges the earth of sinners, preparing this world for His Millennial reign.

This was fully in the minds of Jesus' disciples when they asked Him, *"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6)

What Kingdom? The Kingdom God promised the Jews. God said: *"At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered*

*unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.” (Jeremiah 3:17)*

*“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Ezekiel 36:25-28)*

The parallel accounts in Mark 13:1f and Luke 21:5f tell us that Jesus' discourse of Matthew 24-25 occurred just after Jesus had left the temple for the last time and had predicted its destruction. He said that not one stone of this magnificent structure would be left upon another. (See Luke 21:5) Can there be any doubt that the disciples perceived because of the degree of destruction that would destroy the temple, which Jesus was referring to events at the end of their present age and the coming of the promised Kingdom. The age the disciples referred to is the end of the Old Testament dispensation which would end in God restoring the nation of Israel and their Messiah ruling from Jerusalem. This present age in which we are living today is a different age that we refer to as the Church Age. At the time, Jesus responded to their question; the current Church Age was not in view and did not begin until fifty days after Christ returned to Heaven.

The disciples as well as most of the Jews were looking for God to fulfill His promises to Israel and were asking when the Messiah would return and set up His promised Kingdom. Christ's strong condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees of Matthew 23 clearly set the stage for the disciples to be very concerned about these events. Jesus said that judgment would come upon this generation (Matt. 23:36-39).

In Matthew 24:2, Jesus said that the beautiful Jewish temple would be destroyed. This was shocking news to the disciples and greatly alarming to them. Jesus then left the temple grounds proceeding east. He exited probably through the Eastern Gate, walking across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives, which was in sight of the temple mound. As He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately as Matthew 24:3 records, and ask Him when these things would occur and what would be the signs of the end of the age. Therefore, contextually, Jesus answered that question in the Olivet Discourse and the subject of His discourse.

Christians of our present age were not in view of what the Lord said as He was addressing the subject that was on the mind of the Jews and relevant to them. The disciples did not know anything about the coming Church Age or institution of the local church. Therefore, Jesus's statements were not about this present age, but rather addressed the end of the Old Testament dispensation.

Certainly, believers of this present age will be a part of the Kingdom, but only through their relationship as the bride of Christ. They will also be serving Christ as He rules the Kingdom. A bride becomes the bridegrooms "helpmeet." Paul spoke of this to Timothy saying, "*Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:*" (2 Timothy 2:10-12) Paul uses the pronouns "we, us" which are clearly Christians in this age which began at Pentecost in Acts 2.

To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "*Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.*" (1 Corinthians 6:2-4) This was written to Christians. When will they judge the world and angels? Without question, it will be in the coming Millennial reign of Christ.

## **Jesus Was Preparing His Disciples For His Return To Heaven**

Permit me to labor the point. Many times before, Jesus had explained to the disciples that He would be killed and leaving them. For example, in Matthew 16:21-28, Jesus told His disciples He would be killed, and be raised from the dead on the third day. (See Matt. 14:1f) These statements about His death and ascension preceded Matthew 24 and had set the stage for the uneasiness of the disciples concerning future events. They were looking for Him as the Messiah to set up the Kingdom, but He had not explained to them how this would be done. Thus, contextually the Olivet Discourse is related to the Jews, and Jesus is addressing the coming promised Kingdom, which would begin with the Daniel's 70th Week (the Seven Year Tribulation) and His Second Coming. The present church age is not in view here. What is in view are Daniel's prophecies:

*"And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.*

*And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the over spreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." (Daniel 9:26-27)*

Note that in Matthew 24:14, the Gospel that is being referred to as the "Gospel of the Kingdom." Matthew 3:2, 4:17, 10:5-7, records that John the Baptist, and Jesus both preached the "*Kingdom of God is at hand*." Throughout Jesus' ministry, this was the Gospel He preached. The Good News presented to the Jews proclaimed the coming Kingdom, and that He was the promised Messiah. The Jews clearly understood that the coming of the Messiah would bring about the promised Kingdom Age of the Nation of Israel. They understood that the Old Testament prophets had foretold this Kingdom, and the Jews had been longing for it for centuries. Believing Jews had longed for ages for the peace, security, prosperity, righteousness that God had promised them.

## **The Kingdom Of Heaven Presented And Temporarily Withdrawn**

The gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus preached was of the coming Kingdom and is not the same as the Gospel of the Church Age which presents salvation based upon the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ to all men, Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus was presenting the promised Kingdom to Israel when He would sit on the throne of David and rule the world from Jerusalem.

Isaiah prophesied of this saying, "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*" (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Israel's entrance into the Kingdom would be clearly based on their accepting Him as their Messiah, and their spiritual rebirth as Jesus made clear in John 3:3. He told Nicodemus ". . . *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" (John 3:3)

The Christians of this age who believe and accept Jesus Christ as their Savior are spiritually reborn, have their sins forgiven, and receive eternal life. However, their place in God's plan is not to inherit the Kingdom "per se." Their place in the Kingdom is to be

Christ's bride and body, and as a part of the Kingdom, ruling with Him. (Dan. 7:22; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 1:6; 5:10, 20:4).

## Comparing The Good News For Israel And To Christians In This Age

Jesus and John the Baptist preached the Good News of the offer of the Kingdom. John's Gospel was ". . . *Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (Matthew 3:2) Jesus also preached the same message, "*From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (Matthew 4:17) Jesus was the King, and He was proclaiming Himself as the Messiah and offering Israel their promised Kingdom.

Note the comparison between Matthew 24:14, with 1 Cor. 15:1-4.

*"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."* (Matthew 24:14) (Also see Matt. 4:23, 9:35, 24:14; Mark 1:14-15)

*"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:"* (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Later, during Paul's church planting ministry, he did not preach the Kingdom because the Jews had rejected the Messiah, and the Kingdom offer was temporarily withdrawn. God called Paul to be an Apostle to the Gentiles.

*"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:"* (Acts 9:15)

*"And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles."* (Acts 18:5-6) [Emphasis added]

Without question, the Jews violently rejected Jesus as their Messiah and sought repeatedly to murder Paul. Paul, upon seeing the Jews utter rejection of Jesus turned to the Gentiles to whom God had called him to preach. (Acts 9:15-16)

## **The Book Of Acts Reveals The Transition From The Kingdom Offered To Israel To The Present Church Age**

It is vital to understand the transition that the Book of Acts records. In the beginning, Jesus the Messiah and the Kingdom were being offered to Israel. Jesus, after His resurrection set the stage for the offer of the Kingdom in Acts 1:3-8. Jesus instructed His disciples, *“To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:”* (Acts 1:3) [Emphasis added]

Had the Jews believed and received the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, the last years of the Old Testament dispensation would have begun with the seven year Tribulation, and ending with His Second Coming. However, the Jews did not believe, and the nation rejected Christ.

Peter boldly preached that Jesus was the promised Messiah. *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* (Acts 2:36) Note what Jesus told Peter when the Lord announced, *“. . . That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”* (Matthew 16:18-19) Peter was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, which was the saving message that Jesus was the Messiah who would *“. . . save His people from their sins” as the angel proclaimed to Joseph.* (Matt. 1:21)

It must be understood that Paul initially preached the Gospel to the Jews. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”* (Romans 1:16) Why did he say to the “Jew first?” Because at this time the offer of Israel’s promised Kingdom was still being made.

Paul plainly preached to the Jews whom Jesus had to suffer and be crucified. To the Thessalonians he proclaimed, *“Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is*

*Christ.*”(Acts 17:3) Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection is the basis of salvation and the foundation of God’s offer to Israel of the Kingdom. However, the Jews refused to accept their Messiah and plotted to kill Paul. It was at this time that God began to temporarily withdraw the offer of the Kingdom. In 70 A.D., when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and dispersed the Jews, Israel as a nation no longer existed. This can be seen as the final act in the Lord postponing the Kingdom. It must be appreciated that although the offer of the Kingdom was withdrawn, it was only a temporary secession of the offer. The Old Testament abounds with prophecies of God restoring Israel and given them a Kingdom. This is the Millennial Kingdom that will follow the Tribulation and Second Coming.

The Book of Acts records God’s bona fide offer of the Kingdom to Israel. The rest of the New Testament records the Lord Jesus Christ gathering to Himself a bride and body from the Gentiles. Thus, the Book of Acts unfolds a transitional period in which God was offering salvation and the Millennial Kingdom to the Jews and then the Gospel to the Gentiles. All Christians after Pentecost were Jews, but by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, the churches were mostly made up of saved Gentiles.

*“And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.” (Acts 28:23-28) [Emphasis added]*

Because so many have ignored and not understood this truth, there has been a flood of misinterpretation and confusion by those who mix God’s plans for the Jews with that of Christians in the Church Age. Because of the lack of a discerning of the times, there is presently a rash of false teaching that distorts the truths of salvation, eschatology, ecclesiology, and God’s plan for believers in the Church Age.

Many Christians are confused and there is great division. THIS OUGHT NOT TO BE! God has plainly revealed His truth, but sinful men, yes, even well-meaning pastors,

Bible scholars, and Christians, have failed to be true and faithful students of His word. *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* (2 Timothy 2:15) Many should hang their heads in shame, confess their sin and learn and preach God’s truth.

Let no one make the mistake of thinking that God is finished with Israel. Scriptures abound with the Lord’s promises to restore Israel that was previously referenced in this paper. The question needs to be asked and biblically understood; What is God’s purpose for the Tribulation? Unmistakably, God’s purpose is to renew His offer of the Kingdom to Israel and subsequently save millions of Jews and Gentiles.

In the end, He purges the world of those that reject Him as their Messiah and God. This ushers in the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ, which was God’s plan from the beginning. God will fulfill to the letter His promises to Israel.

Jesus did not offer the Millennial Kingdom to Christians in our dispensation, although Church Age saints certainly will be a part of it. Christians are given something much better, which is being a part of the Body of Christ and His bride who will rule with Him in the Kingdom. The Old Testament saints were not permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit and the Tribulation saints, being a part of the final days of the Old Testament period will logically not be indwelt either.

### **Christians In The Church Age Will Not Go Into Or Through Any Part Of The Seven Year Tribulation. (Rev. 3:10)**

Believers today have the promise of God that we will not go through the coming seven year Tribulation. The Lord promised to those who keep His word, *“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. (Revelation 3:10)* This statement was made to the Philadelphian church that exists before the apostasy of the lukewarm Laodiceans.

Two important evidences show that the scope of the “the *hour of temptation*” is global coming and on the entire world. The word world is *οικουμένη οikoumene* which means the earth or globe. Second, the phrase “hour of temptation” is preceded by the article “the.” If God had not used the article, the phrase could mean a general period of temptation, but with the article, the period is specific. The Lord is not saying I will keep thee from a general period of temptation, but a specific period that is the seven year Tribulation. Since Christ instituted the local church there have always been periods of persecutions and temptations of believers, wars, rumors of wars, apostasy, natural

disasters that Christians have had to endure with the rest of the world. Therefore, this statement is not referring to a general keeping from temptation, but a specific period that comes on all the earth. The question then is what period will bring a specific temptation on all the earth? The answer is clear that the period is the coming seven year Tribulation, because it will be a global event. Thus, the Lord is saying, I will keep you from that hour. How? The Lord will rapture Christians in this age and remove them before the Tribulation begins. This will end the Church Age.

## **The Misinterpretation Of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4**

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 Paul wrote, *“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”*

Those who teach a Pre, Mid, or Post Tribulational rapture use this as their proof text. They teach that Christians will go through part of the seven year Tribulation, but will not go through the worst part that they understand is when the Lord pours out his wrath toward the middle or end of the seven years. However, on close examination 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 does not support their views and is completely in line with Revelation 3:10.

To begin with, the passage is giving strong assurance to the Thessalonian believers that they had not missed the return of Christ. False teachers apparently had been teaching that the rapture had already taken place. Paul says the “day of Christ” which refers to the rapture had not occurred.

The statement “is at hand” *enistemi*, in verse 2, is often misinterpreted and falsely assumed to say that it is the rapture that is not at hand or near. This would contradict the many scriptures that teach the imminent return of the Lord. However, the definition of the word “ενιστημι, *enistemi*, means, “to be present” or is now present.<sup>2</sup> Thayer also lists

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<sup>2</sup> W. E. Vines, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (Nashville:Thomas Nelson, 1985) p.288.

the word as meaning “present.”<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:38, 1 Corinthians 7:26, Galatians 1:4, Hebrews 9:9, 1 Cor. 3:22, all translate the word “ενιστημι” as “present.” What Paul said to the Thessalonians was that the rapture had not occurred. He continued and warned them not to let anyone deceive them because a falling away or apostasy must come first. This falling away and apostasy will occur during the Tribulation when God sends strong delusion and many believe the lies of the Antichrist. If the rapture had taken place the Thessalonians would have been in the Tribulation period, but clearly, they were not. Thus, they were assured the rapture had not happened because they were not in the Tribulation.

### **The Imminent Return Of Christ.**

In the New Testament, the Lord’s return is always seen as imminent. Believers in this Church Age are to be ever ready for the rapture. If the rapture would, take place somewhere in the Tribulation the any moment return of the Lord would lose its emphasis. If in the Tribulation, Christian could read the Book of Revelation and accurately figure when it would take place by observing the predicted events of the various judgments. It is interesting that among those who reject the Pre-Tribulational rapture, there is no consensus as to when it would occur. Their views widely vary from sometime around the Sixth Seal the Second Coming. A false interpretation always produces confusion.

Walvoord affirms the imminent return of the Lord, “Since the beginning of the early churches, believers have longed for the return of their Savior. Repeatedly, the New Testament tells believers that the Lord’s return is “at hand.” This phrase uses the word *εγγιζω eggizo* which means “near or nigh.”<sup>4</sup> The phrase is used 7 times in the New Testament. In Romans 13:12; Philippians 4:5; 1Peter 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:6; Revelation 1:3, 22:10 each uses the word *eggizo*. 2 Timothy 4:6 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2 use the word *enistemi*. Each reference is to the imminent return of the Lord.

Paul encouraged Titus to be, “*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*” (Titus 2:13) Titus lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, yet Paul told him to be looking for Christ’s return and the rapture. If the rapture occurs In 1 Thessalonians 4:4 he reminded them, “*Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,*” (1

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Hendrickson:Mass, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Vines, p.288.

Thessalonians 5:6-9) The exhortation to the Thessalonians was to be ready for the imminent return of the Lord when they would be delivered from the wrath.

1 John 3:3 would have little significance if Christ's return was not imminent. *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."* (1 John 3:2-3) John is speaking about the rapture when believers of this Church Age will be resurrected. Looking for Christ's imminent return is one incentive for a Christian to live a godly life daily for the Lord. To the Romans, Paul urged them to "wake up" because the return of the Lord was nearer than they thought. (See Rom. 13:11-14)

Further, Matthew 24:21-22, specifically states that Jesus is referring to the events of "great tribulation" and leaves no room for doubt as to the period Christ is describing.

Another point is that the Lord did not use the term "the day of the Lord" which in the Old and New Testament is used 29 times refers to a time of God's judgment when He pours out His wrath on unbelievers.<sup>5</sup> Most of those who put the rapture in the Tribulation falsely conclude the phrase is the same as "day of the Lord." However, the phrase here is "day of Christ" and refers to the rapture which is the "blessed hope" for Church Age saints. The "day of Christ" will be a time of rejoicing for Christians, not of sorry and bitterness as "the day of the Lord" characterizes.

The phrase "day of the Lord" is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:2. *"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness."* (1 Thessalonians 5:1-5)

To interpret properly the passage the phrase "day of the Lord" needs to be identified. First, Paul continues his explanation of the rapture and explains they have no need that he write them concerning *the times and season*. He stresses the fact, the Lord's coming will not be announced and comes as a thief in the night. He emphasizes this pointing by showing the unsaved that are not looking for the imminent return of Christ will be suddenly faced with destruction and they shall not escape. The reference to the travail of a woman further illustrates the destruction comes suddenly and more

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<sup>5</sup> See Isaiah 13:9–11; Amos 5:18–20; 1 Thess 5:2–3; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 6:17; 16:14.

importantly unavoidably. Those who are not ready for the rapture and having rejected Jesus Christ as their Savior will immediately enter the devastating seven year Tribulation, which is the wrath of God poured out in judgment.

Paul points out to the Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century that they were not in darkness, that the day would overtake them as a thief because they are the children of the light and of the day. Do not misunderstand. Paul was teaching to believers in the early church. There is no question the discourse stresses the sudden and imminent return of Christ followed by the catastrophic events of the Tribulation. The passage plainly says believers would not be caught unaware and be a part of the destruction that comes on the world.

### **God Sends Strong Delusion To Unbelievers Who Reject Christ In The Church Age**

There has been much debate as to the meaning of 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, *“And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12) Those whom God sends a strong delusion, to believe a lie, are stated as those who have not believed and had pleasure in unrighteousness. False doctrine, as perpetrated by the false prophet, will abound in the seven years of desolation. God states He sends these unbelievers in the seven years, the strong delusion to believe the lies of a false and world-wide religion. The question is why He takes this action? Because of taking pleasure in unrighteousness, these people will not receive the love of the truth and thus damn themselves. Evidently, this in time would be before the Tribulation and continue into the period.

It seems one can correctly conclude that those who heard the Gospel prior to the Tribulation and did not believe the truth and rejected the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ are the ones who are sent the strong delusion. Because of their unbelief and rejection of truth, they will not be saved and not raptured. Apparently, the Holy Spirit does no longer bring conviction to these unbelievers, and God’s longsuffering comes to an end. They are allowed to follow the Antichrist’s false religion without the intervention of the Holy Spirit’s convicting ministry.

Those who receive the strong delusion are probably not those who merely heard about Jesus Christ, but never in their hearts made a conscious decision to reject Him. Most of the world has heard of Jesus Christ but know little about Him or about God’s truth. Millions will be saved in the seven years who for the first time hear the truth and accept it.

## The Last Days

Without question, Christians have been in the “last days” since Christ’s return to heaven. John explained, *“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.”* (1 John 2:18) [emphasis added] Therefore being in the last days since the first century means Christians have been looking for the imminent return of Christ since the time of the early churches.

When God revealed the mystery of the rapture, He concluded the revelation with the words *“Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:18) How could there be any comfort in knowing, that as the bride of Christ, the Church Age saints will have to endure part of the horrible events that will come to those rejecting Christ. Matthew describes this seven years as *“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”* (Matthew 24:21)

Further, in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 after warning about the absolute surety of the rapture and the devastation that the unsaved would face being left on earth Paul gave assurance that Christians would not experience the wrath of God. *“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10)

Some have falsely concluded that the “wrath of God” does not immediately begin when the Tribulation starts. They teach the wrath of God refers to the judgments beginning around the time of the seventh Seal Judgment. They explain that the Seal Judgments are the wrath of man or the Satan empowered Antichrist and not God. However, that cannot be the case because beginning in Revelation 6:1 and following, it is Christ who opens each Seal thus initiating these beginning judgments that are the wrath of God.

In beginning His judgments God allows the Antichrist to be His instrument of His wrath. God has throughout history used pagan nations and individuals to bring judgment on His people. With the Holy Spirit restrained clearly God is using the Antichrist to accomplish His will. In the fourth Seal Revelation 6:8 says that God gives

the pale horse rider the power to kill a fourth part of the people on earth. It is God who inaugurates this mass genocide on mankind. This means that approximately 1.76 billion people will be killed during the Seal Judgments.

Revelation 6:9-10 records that as the Fifth Seal is opened John saw the souls of them slain for the word of God. Thus a part of the 1.76 billion people who are killed are martyrs whom the Antichrist has murdered during the Fourth Seal Judgment. These believers were not spared the wrath of God that allowed the Antichrist to persecute and kill them. Clearly, Paul stated that those of the Church Age are not appointed to wrath. (2 Thess. 2:9-20)

Furthermore, God's hand is seen in that the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit will be suspended when the Tribulation begins. Note what 2 Thessalonians 2:6-12 reveal:

*“And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:6-12)

God says the Holy Spirit will be “taken out of the way” and Satan will have a free hand to bring the disastrous events on the believing Jews and Gentiles on earth.

### **Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week The Great Tribulation Begins. Matthew 24-25**

Even though the events that Jesus describes have been happening throughout history, the magnitude of these events cannot be compared with those of the Tribulation. God has not been pouring out His wrath in the past two thousand years. What is happening today is not the fulfilling of Christ's prophecies, but the embryonic beginnings, which will escalate into the catastrophic desolations of the seven years of the Tribulation.

*“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.*

*Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.*

*And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.*

*And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.” (Daniel 9:24-27)*

Daniel said this last week, as verse 27 reveals, will conclude the Old Testament and will end with the Messiah; (1) ending the transgression and sin of Israel, (2) making the reconciliation for iniquity, (3) to bring in everlasting righteousness, (4) to seal up the vision and prophecy, and (5) to anoint the most Holy.

Only one of these five goals Daniel states has been accomplished. Jesus made the “reconciliation for iniquity” which was His redemptive work on the cross where He with His shed blood paid the sin debt of the world. The other four elements in God’s plan have not been accomplished yet. This is strong evidence that the present Church Age is not part of the Old Testament dispensation and is a separate economy of God’s overall program for the world. When Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, clearly God interjected this present dispensation in which He would gather to Himself a bride from among the Gentiles.

Nothing in God’s word even hints that God’s purposes for Israel, as expressed by Daniel 9:24, were put aside. They were only moved to a later time which is yet future to this age. Thus, with the beginning of Revelation 6 the Old Testament dispensation ends. This is followed by the outpouring of the Seal Judgments, and the last week of Daniel’s Seventy weeks will unfold. At the end of this last week the Messiah will purge the Earth and be anointed the Righteous King, who sets up His Kingdom and rules in the Millennium. The Church Age is not in view having ended with the rapture of all the saints

of God who have been saved since Pentecost, meaning born again Christians of this current Church Age.”<sup>6</sup>

## **The Sequence Of These Events**

### **Matthew 24**

24:5 - Many will come and claim to be Christ.

24:6-7 – There will be wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in many places.

24:8 - These things are the beginning of sorrows (birth pains).

24:9 – Believers will be persecuted, martyred and hated by the unbelieving world.

24:10 – There will be open apostasy, betrayal, and hatred among those professing to be believers.

24:11 - Many false prophets will deceive many.

24:12 - Iniquity shall abound, and the love of many will grow cold.

24:13 - God promises physical salvation to those who would endure and survive until the end. These are saved people who will go into the Millennial kingdom in their natural bodies and repopulate the earth. (This is not a reference to spiritual salvation. Salvation is not received during any age through the works of man. (Eph. 2:8-9) Salvation is received by faith and is a free gift of God.)

24:14 - The "Gospel of the Kingdom" shall be preached unto all nations and then the end comes. This is probably accomplished by the 144,000 sealed Jews. Note the Gospel is specifically stated as being the Gospel of the Kingdom. All men are saved by accepting by faith in the Gospel that has been preached since the early churches. However, this statement specifically states it is the Gospel of the Kingdom that is preached. The Gospel of the Kingdom is for Israel announces their promised Kingdom. This verse is not addressing this Church Age. God is renewing His offer of the Kingdom to Israel.

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<sup>6</sup> Cooper P. Abrams, III, *A Commentary of the Book of Revelation, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, THE SEAL JUDGMENTS, REVELATION 6:1-17*, (<http://bible-truth.org/Revelation-Chapter6.doc>.) 2013.

This preaching of the Gospel in all the nations will occur during the Tribulation, not in our present age. In spite of the great evangelistic work that has and is being done on earth only a fraction of the nations of the earth have a clear Gospel witness. US mission organizations estimate that only about half the country has actually heard a true Gospel witness. Many have heard about Jesus Christ but do not really know who He is or what He did by coming to earth. Many, such as the cults, deny His deity and are worshiping a false Christ. However, in God's mercy and grace, He will cause all on earth to hear the Gospel. Even as it is today it appears a great many will reject Him, however, as Revelation 6:8-11, 7:1:17 reveal there will be an innumerable number of people saved during the Tribulation.

24:15 - Temple will be defiled by the Antichrist. (Dan. 9:27) This is the Tribulation temple and would seem to place the time about the middle of the seven years when Satan is cast to the earth and possesses the Antichrist.

24:16-20 - Those in Judea flee to the mountains. How can one relate this to the present Church Age? Geographically and specifically Jesus is referring to Jews in Israel, who were asking about His setting up the Kingdom. He explains to the Jews in Judea, Israel to flee to the mountains to avoid what is about to happen.

24:21 - Then shall be the "great tribulation." The magnitude and scope of these events have no parallel in history, past or present. Many believe this is a reference to the bowl or vial judgments of Revelation 15-18, which occur from the middle to the end of the Seven Year Tribulation. The judgment begins with Christ opening each of the Seal Judgments and will continue into the Trumpet and Vial judgments, thus the devastation will grow progressively worse.

24:22 - The devastation on earth will be the worse the world has ever seen and if God did not shorten the days, no one would be left alive. Satan directing the Antichrist will be raging completely out of control in these last days. He will be intent on destroying all life on earth, thus ending God's plans.

24:23-26 – Unbelievers and evil men will use the crisis for personal gain, and many will present themselves as messiahs, offering to save or give relief from the suffering. They will be doing great contrived miracles (signs) to support their deception. Jesus spoke of false miracles in Matthew 7:22-23 done by "workers of iniquity." What foolish and depraved men these will be who even after experiencing God's judgment on the earth will seek to make merchandise of the situation. In desperation, people will be seeking help

and will be told of messiahs who are in the desert or who are apparently secluding themselves from the public.

24:27 - The reference to lightning coming from the east and shining to the west is an illustration of the suddenness of Christ's return.

24:28 – In Ezekiel 39:17-19 and Revelation 19:17-18 mentions the birds eating carrion after Armageddon. God will destroy the nations gathered in the Jezreel Valley, who are fighting each other in the Armageddon war.

24:29 - Immediately after the "tribulation," the sun and moon go dark, and the stars fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Note this is a Universal event not just a shower of meteors or few asteroids hitting the earth. The whole universe is shaken.

## **The Second Coming Of Christ**

24:30 – There will be a visible sign in the heavens of Christ's coming. What this sign is, is not revealed, but everyone on earth will see it and know it means Christ is returning. This is in counter distinction to the teaching of the imminent return of Christ presented in the Epistles to the churches in this present Church Age. Believers in this dispensation are not told to look for signs, but to look for Christ's imminent return. Paul states that signs relate to the Jews, not the Gentiles. *"For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom."* (1 Cor. 1:22)

24:31 - Christ sends his angels with a great sound of a trumpet to gather His "elect" from "the four corners of the wind and one end of heaven to the other." Mark uses the term "from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven." Thus, Christ gathers the saved in all of heaven and all over the earth at the moment of His Second Coming. The believers of this present Church Age being the "bride of Christ" will have been raptured before the Seven Year Tribulation began. At the Second Coming, they will accompany Christ Jesus, along with the saints throughout the ages past as He returns to earth. On the earth, those believers who are still alive and remain until the Second Coming will be gathered to Jerusalem to meet the Savior.

This is not the rapture because the details of these two events are different. Here in Matthew 24:31, Christ sends angels to gather the saints to be present at His arrival. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, states that Christ Himself will descend with a shout, and the dead in Christ shall rise first and those alive will be changed and "caught up" (raptured) to meet

the Lord in the air. No angels are involved. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, states that those caught up will be changed in the "twinkling of an eye." The "gathering" of the saints by angels clearly is a different event than the instantaneous "catching up" of Christians of this age in the rapture.

24:32-35 - Parable of the fig tree. Jesus uses the process by which a fig tree produces fruit, as an illustration of relating the sign He has just mentioned in His Second Coming. He is saying that as you see these events or signs happening look for the Second Coming and the age to end. As stated earlier Christians in this age are never told to look for signs, but to be always ready.

Jesus is now answering the disciples question as to when the Kingdom would be set up. Up to this point He is telling them what the signs would be. There is no correlation between 1 Thess. 4:16, and Matthew 24:31. In 1 Thess. 4:16, there is the voice of "one" angel, identified as the archangel. In Matthew 24:31, Christ sends forth, a plurality of angels, meaning more than one. Contextually, the "elect" of Matthew 24:22 are the same "elect" of Matthew 24:31, which are on the earth during the Tribulation.

24:36-39 – The comparison to the days of Noah. Only God knows the hour of His coming. "BUT" Jesus says it will be like it was in the time before the Flood. Noah preached for one hundred and twenty years and worked to complete the ark. He too did not know when the Flood would come, but he continued faithful preparing the ark. Jesus is predicting an extended interval between His leaving and His promised return. Using Noah as an example of perseverance and faith, and He is telling them not to give up hope during the long interval.

## **The Rapture Of The Lost**

24:40-41 – This describes the rapture of the lost. This is not, the Rapture of the Christians in this the Church Age. The context places this event at the Second Coming, which ends the Tribulation. The ones that are taken are taken in judgment and parallel those taken in judgment in the Flood. In the Flood those that were taken were lost and those left were saved. At the Second Coming, Christ will remove the unsaved from the earth in judgment. (See Ezek. 20:38, Mt. 8:12, 13:41-42,49-50, 25:41, 2 Thess. 1:7-9). The saints alive at the Second Coming will remain and enter the Kingdom in their natural bodies (Isa. 4:3, Ezek. 20:40-42, Zech. 13:8-9, Matt. 13:43, 24:34). Those alive on the earth at the Second Coming will include the Jews who believed during the seven years and are the remnant God promised would remain alive and be saved. (See Isa. 10:21-22, 11:11)

This cannot be the Rapture, because you would have all the saints removed from the earth, thus no one to populate the Millennial Kingdom in their natural unglorified bodies. Further, at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom there would only be the unsaved left on earth. This clearly cannot be referring to the rapture of believers of this present Church Age, as the whole of the Olivet Discourse is dealing with the 70th Week of Daniel and relates to Israel.

24:42-44 – **The Parable of the Householder.** This is a warning to the Jews in the Tribulation to watch and be ready for Christ's arrival at the Second Coming.

24:45-51 – **The Parable of the Wise Servant.** Note that in each parable, there is a warning to watch for the signs and get ready. Jesus said in 24:32-34 to watch for the signs and used the illustration of the changing of the seasons. Again, it needs to be stated that believers in the church age, who are the Bride and Body of Christ, are told to look for His imminent return. We today are not told to look for signs, but to be ready to be caught up at any second to meet the Lord. "*For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.*" (1 Corinthians 1:22)

## **The Marriage Supper Of The Lamb**

### **Matthew 25**

25:1-13 - **Parable of the Ten Virgins.** Again, Jesus is using a parable to warn the nation of Israel, and those living in the Tribulation, to be ready for His coming as their Messiah and the subsequent promised Kingdom. This verse specifically states that the coming Kingdom is "likened" to ten virgins. These are Jewish virgins as only the Jews will be looking for the bridegroom.

The virgins of this parable are invited guests to the wedding of the Bride Groom. The picture is the wedding of the Bride Groom who clearly is the Lord Jesus Christ. Only those saved in this dispensation, the Church Age, are called the bride of Christ. (Matt. 21:9) The virgins clearly are not the bride, but guests to the wedding. The guests, who are living in the Tribulation, are who are told to be ready for the Bridegrooms arrival. Christ's invitation to believe and be saved is to all men on earth. Yet, only those who believed will be saved and attend the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Clearly, it is a serious mistake to conclude that those who are looking for the coming of the Bride Groom are Church Age believers. They are the bride, and they are already prepared. They have been resurrected at the rapture before the seven years

begin and judged at the BEMA judgment of Christians. They, in their new bodies and pure are prepared for the wedding day. The bride is waiting for her bridegroom the Lamb, and the marriage supper.

However, here the invited guests, who are the Jews, in the seven year Tribulation, are being warned to be ready for Christ's Second Coming. The point is this: Jesus is challenging all the Jews and those alive during the Tribulation to look for the signs He mentioned earlier. They will see the signs of the times, and realized the Messiah will soon come and make themselves ready for Him. Both the wise and the foolish virgins were aware that the Bridegroom would soon arrive.

Those who reject Christ's message, and the signs in this parable are referred to as foolish virgins who were not prepared. They will miss the Bridegroom and His wedding. In other words, the wise virgins were ready and entered into the Kingdom, and the foolish virgins not being prepared and were rejected. It is vital to understand that the judgments in the Tribulation are poured on the earth to warn men of Christ's return. The Old Testament abounds with the forewarning of the Messiah's coming. God is longsuffering and desires all to be saved. Each time in God's word where God is bringing judgment, He also is offering salvation if they repent and believe.

Revelation 19:7-9 is the first reference to believers of the Church Age since Revelation 2-3. This is describing the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Those invited to the Marriage Supper are guests, and the guests are those living after Christ's bride is raptured. Verse 19, specifically distinguishes between the bride and the invited guests to the wedding. *"And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God."* (Revelation 19:9) The invited guests will be the Jews and Gentiles saved during the seven years of Tribulation.

**25:14-30 – The Parable of the Talents.** Once again, Jesus is using the term "For the kingdom of heaven is "as." This sets the context of His remarks. Jesus, in this parable, presents a contrast between those who looked for the Master's return and wisely used their talents and those who did not. They all knew the Master would return and require an accounting of them. Two servants faithfully used what they were given, but the third was slothful and indifferent, and he was condemned. The unprofitable servant was cast into outer darkness, which is a reference to hell. In the context of the parable, Jesus is saying to Israel that they should be looking for the Master's return and use the talents they have been given. Verse 29 makes the point that Israel had the knowledge of the Messiah and the coming Kingdom. They had been given much, and therefore they would be

judged accordingly. They had the privilege of the Old Testament scriptures, the prophecies of the coming Messiah, seeing Him, hearing his preaching, and seeing His miracles. For the most part, the majority of Israel rejected all this truth they had been given.

## **The Second Coming Of Christ**

### **The Judgment of the Nations**

25:31 - Jesus then says the Kingdom would begin when He comes with all His angels and sets on the throne. Those on earth, whom God purges at His coming, will be cast into Gehenna, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 8:11-12 reveals many Jews will not be among those who enter the Kingdom, but many Gentiles will. *“And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* (Matthew 8:11-12)

What a tragedy this is as those who could have believed realize they have no further chance and are condemned in the torment of “outer darkness.” The gnashing of teeth pictures the intense pain and regret they are experiencing.

### **The Judgment Of Nations**

25:32--33 The Judgment of the people of all nations is referred to as the sheep and goat judgment. This is a judgment of the individual Gentiles (nations) who are alive at the Second Coming having survived the seven year Tribulation. This is referred to the "Judgment of Nations" as verse 32 states all nations will be gathered before Him. However, the use of the word "nations" refers to individuals of these nations, not a whole nation or a nation as a whole. No nation is made up of all saved or all unsaved people, thus the judgment is of individuals of the nations of earth. This judgment is referred to in Joel 3:1-3:

*“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.”* (Joel 3:1-3)

The judgment will be one of separation or division of the “sheep, meaning believers, on His right and on His left the “goats” who are unbelievers.

25:34 Note that this judgment of the Gentiles takes place when Jesus returns at the Second Coming. This judgment occurs on earth at the Second Coming as the Lord divides the saved from the lost living inhabitants of this world. This is mentioned in Matthew 24:41-42 which is the "rapture" or catching away of the unsaved or lost who rejected Christ. All at the judgment come to it in their natural bodies. The lost are those on earth who are purged from the earth and cast into the Lake of Fire. The saved, are those on earth who believed and by faith were saved and survived the seven year Tribulation and will go into the Millennium in their physical bodies.

It is important to recognize that there is no resurrection involved here and no mention of a judgment of the dead. God is judging people who are alive on the earth. Joel 3:2 says it will take place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Some believe this is the Valley of Berachah (2 Chron. 20:26) where Jehoshaphat defeated the Moabites and Ammorties, which gave the valley a new name. Others refer to the place as being the Valley of Kidron outside Jerusalem. Others refer to Zechariah 14:4, which says the Lord will return to the Mount of Olives, and a great valley will be opened. Jehoshaphat means "Jehovah judges." It seems probable that this takes place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat as the name of this new valley implies a judgment. Here Christ will judge the nations. No one can be dogmatic as to the place of this judgment because the place is not revealed, however, your writer holds to the latter view, which seems to be more likely.

25:35-46 - The basis of this judgment is based on how they treated "my brethren" (Matt. 25:40). This refers how these how saved Gentiles treated the saved Jews that they had contact with during the Tribulation. What is interesting is that these saved Gentiles did not seem to be aware of the importance to Christ of their benevolence to the Jews, His brethren. No one should ever miss the fact that the Jews are God's chosen people. Clearly, the Lord has a special place in His heart for, those of His chosen nation who accept Him as their Messiah. Paul confirms this in Romans 9:6, "*Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.*" These saved Gentiles simply did what was right in helping their fellow believers who happened to be Jews.

God sends, at the beginning of the Tribulation, 144,000 Jewish evangelists who preach all over the world. (Rev. 7:1-8, 14:1-5) It should be noted that today, in this dispensation, the responsibility in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century to spread the Gospel was given to His

disciples the command to teach all nations the Gospel. (Matthew 28:19-20). Subsequently, the commission is given to all Christians since. However, with all Christians removed from the earth at the rapture, God calls and seals the 144,000 Jews to be His witness in the seven Tribulation years. It will be these Jews who appropriately will be sent to evangelize their fellow Jews and also to the Gentiles. They will be the ones preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom to every nation.

This judgment of nations is based on how the Gentiles receive these Jewish preachers, and the Jews who believe in Christ during this period. This is further evidence that the seven year Tribulation is a Jewish event. These Gentiles also believe the Gospel and are saved. I may suggest the persecution of Jews will be greater than Gentiles. These saved Gentiles aided the Jews who were being persecuted by the Antichrist. Jesus calls them "blessed" and tells them that the Kingdom was also prepared for them before the foundation of the world.

The main focus of the Antichrist, who is possessed by Satan, will be to destroy the Jews in the Tribulation. Even at this time, when he sees the Lord pouring out judgment on those who reject Him, Satan will continue to hinder and try to destroy the Lord's plans. If the Jews could be destroyed, the Millennial and the promised Kingdom of Israel would not occur, thus God would default on His promises. Accountingly, Satan's goal is to use the Antichrist and his forces to destroy the Jews from off the earth.

This is not a judgment that imparts salvation to those who have worked for their salvation by doing the good deeds of helping these Jews. Salvation is never received because of one's good works. (Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 4:5) The works of compassion shown to the saved Jews is evidence that these Gentiles, who are to be part of the Kingdom, believed the message that Jesus was the Messiah (Savior) and accepted Him as their Savior. The Gentiles will also have the witness of the 144,000, and the scriptures that plainly reveal the judgments they are seeing are from God. Those who by faith accepted God's word are saved in the same way all men are saved, by believing and receiving Jesus Christ (Messiah) as their Savior.

The result for these, who believed both Jew and Gentile, is that they enter the Kingdom alive in their natural bodies. They are not resurrected, but remain in their human bodies unchanged. They then repopulate the world during the 1000 year reign of Jesus Christ on earth. This explains who will be the earthly inhabitants of the Millennial Kingdom. This fulfills the prophecies of Daniel 7:14, Isa. 55:4-6, and Micah 4:1-2 which states a large group of Gentiles will have a part in the kingdom. Although most of the Jews never accepted it in the Old Testament, God plainly revealed that the Gentiles

would be a part of the Kingdom promised to Israel. (See Psa. 2:1-10; Isa. 63:1-6; Joel 3:2-16; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 14:1-3)

Note also that there will be many saved Jews alive, and these will be the ones who actually inherit the earth in the Millennium kingdom. The saved the Jews who have died will be resurrected and in their spiritual bodies, and they too will take part in the kingdom in the same way as Christians who are saved in the current age.

The "goats" are pictured on the left hand of the Savior, as Matthew 25:41 states, and they are condemned and their final destiny consigned, "*into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*" The judgment they are consigned to is Gehenna that follows the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15.

They had the same opportunity as the "sheep" that received the Gospel and repented of their sins. They heard the message of the 144,000 and other saints saved during this period, but rejected it and thus sealed their eternal doom.

Matthew 24:40-41 explains that those who reject the Messiah during the Tribulation will be caught up, removed from the earth and judged. Those left on earth are saved people; the elect, who will enter the Kingdom Age.

Matthew 24:14 describes the place of their judgment is the, "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." This plainly is a reference to "Gehenna" the "Lake of Fire" (Revelations 20:14) and not to "Hades" the present abode of the unsaved dead. Satan is never said to be in Hades, the present abode of the lost who are awaiting the final judgment or his angels. Revelations 20:10, says that Satan will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, before the judgments of the unsaved lost at the Great White Throne judgment (Revelations 20:11-15). Thus, this verse is saying the unsaved of the Great Tribulation are judged and condemned immediately and cast into the eternal Lake of Fire and are not a part of the Great White Throne judgment that happens after the Millennium.

## Conclusion

As Warren Wiersbe said, "Next to the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter, no part of Matthew has suffered more misinterpretation than the chapters 24-25! Almost every major cult has used Matthew 14:1-41, along with Daniel 9:20-27, to "prove" that Christ has already returned!

Even well-meaning evangelicals confuse the issue by applying this section to the church in this age."<sup>7</sup>

Every detail of Matthew 24-25 is related to the Jews and the nation of Israel. In the Old Testament God's focus was on Israel, but Gentiles were also saved through their relationship with the Lord's chosen people. It will be the same in the seven year Tribulation.

There is nothing in these two chapters which relates to the present church age or believers of this dispensation. It is therefore, a serious mistaken to interpret the Olivet Discourse as referring to end of the Church Age and there is no support for a Pre-wrath, Mid, or Post Tribulational rapture or Amillennialism. If understood properly, these passages support the doctrine of a Pre-Tribulational rapture of believers in this present Church Age and of the Pre-Millennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 24-25 addresses the events of the Tribulation, which is the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy that ends with the Messiah coming to reign in power. Christ's Second Coming will end the Old Testament dispensation, and not the Church Age will end earlier at the rapture. Jesus' ministry was in the Old Testament dispensation. So far, only 483 years of Daniel's prophecy has transpired, which leaves the final seven years (Daniel's 70th Week) still future. The Old Testament dispensation is not completed, but will be finished with the coming of the Messiah at the end of the last week. Thus, none of the statements in Matthew 24-25 refer to the Church Age or Church Age saints.

To labor the point, clearly Christians are not present or mentioned in the Tribulation events of Matthew 24-25, nor in Revelation 4-19. Yes, an innumerable amount of people will be saved during the Tribulation, which will include Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 24:14). This begins at the opening of the Tribulation period with God saving and sealing 144,000 Jews. If Christians in the Church Age are present during the Tribulation, why did He not include Gentiles as well in calling and sealing this special group of believers? The absence of Gentiles plainly shows the Jewish nature and focus and the emphasis of Daniel's 70th Week that ends the Old Testament dispensation. These saved people will be Old Testament saints, not Christians and not the body of Christ or Bride of Christ. The Tribulation is a Jewish event when God restores Israel, the Temple worship, and saves a remnant of the Jews and Gentiles, who will populate the earth in the Millennium and fulfill His unconditional promises and covenant with His chosen people, the nation of Israel.

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<sup>7</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, Expository Outlines on the New Testament, Calvary Book Room, Covington, KY, 1982, p61

The modern teachers of the Pre-Wrath, Middle and Post Tribulational views are making the same mistake the Judaizers that Paul dealt with in the early churches. They mix God's promises to the nation of Israel with that of Christians in the Church Age. Clearly, God through Paul condemned this false interpretation of His word.

Mixing God's promises to Israel with those of Christians in this the Church Age is also the error of the cults, Pentecostals, Charismatics, Amillennialists, the Reformed movement and those who purport the Lord will cause His bride to go through the catastrophic events of the Tribulation. These false teachers fail to understand the context and emphasis of the Gospels and God's separate programs for Israel. Though we have a common Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-5, not Matt. 4:17) and are grafted into the God's plan for Israel. Christians in this age are not Israel and God has a different destiny for us. He also has not abandoned His plans and promises to Israel as a nation which is the main focus of the coming seven year Tribulation. Further, God has promised the blessed hope which is to come for the believers in this the Church Age, in the rapture that precedes the Tribulation.

*“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”* (Revelation 22:20)