

SIGNS, TRIBULATION, AND THE NEED FOR PREPAREDNESS

AN IN-DEPTH COMMENTARY ON JESUS'
TEACHING ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 24 & 25



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“**Signs, Tribulation, and the Need for Preparedness**” was published as an eBook on April 23rd 2026. The email contact for the publisher is: under-the-radar@outlook.com . The author’s personal website, containing more than 600 articles and 14 eBooks which are available for free digital download, is at <https://diakrisis-project.com> , and his personal email address is diakrisis-project@outlook.com .

The Scripture quotations in this book are often taken from the **Berean Standard Bible**, which is in the public domain. Other versions may sometimes be used. The author also consults the Hebrew or Greek texts and uses his own personal translations of them based on leading concordances and lexicons. The chief purpose is always to obtain the most transparent and certain meaning possible.

The Cover photo shows the Mount of Olives.
Cover designed and created by Alan Morrison.
Text layout designed and typeset by Alan Morrison.
Main text is set in 10/11pt Book Antiqua font.

This book is dedicated to the One
who preached the words in the
Gospel of Matthew, chapters 24 and 25,
and whose Spirit inspired them to be
written in a book for us to read today:
The Bible.

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Preface

Writing this commentary is a project I have wanted to tackle for some years, for very special reasons. It all goes back to the mid-1970s, as an aficionado at that time of mysticism (East and West), theosophy, and Alice Bailey's teachings on the New Age, I used to visit regularly a labyrinthine bookshop on two floors called Willshaw's (now no longer in existence but similar to the modern Waterstones bookshops) in John Dalton Street, Manchester, UK. I spent a lot of time in there, sitting on the floor, sampling bits of books of all kinds, some of which I would buy. To this day, I vividly remember the profound experience I had there the first time I unwittingly took a Bible off the shelves of the extensive section labelled 'Spiritual' and it providentially fell open in my hands at the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 24. I didn't even realise it was a Bible at first. I was simply attracted to the artwork on the sleeve cover, which was some kind of iconographic design, such as one finds in the Eastern Orthodox churches. When I read the page on which it had fallen open, this was a watershed moment in my life. Suddenly, as I read, an inner light went on and something at a very deep level began to make sense. Jesus' words touched something within me, especially the phrase "*All these are the birth-pains of the new age*" (Matthew 24:8).¹ I was determined to understand what these words meant. They actually gave me goose-bumps. In those moments, I kind of fell in love with Bible prophecy.

However, it was to be more than a further decade of lostness, confusion and spiritual/philosophical exploration before I was moved to become a disciple of Christ and saw the context of the words in Matthew 24 with the whole gamut of what the Bible teaches from "*In the beginning...*" to its very last words.

That initial encounter with Jesus' teaching on the Mount of Olives has led inexorably to the point where I am now, more than fifty years later, where I feel ready to explore if I can do full justice to that extraordinary portion of Scripture in an exposition such as this.

¹ The Bible version was the now defunct "New English Bible". The actual Greek text of that verse, in literal translation, says, "*All these are the beginning of birth-pains*". The NEB, a dynamic equivalent translation, says, "*birth-pains of the new age*", which is what really does lie behind the text.

In a way, this project is in similar territory to the Book of Revelation – on which I wrote a 600-page commentary a couple of years ago² – in the sense that it is prophecy on a number of levels that has been interpreted in different ways, often outlandishly. With both, the so-called “Preterists” have had a whale of a time trying to claim that the content only refers to what has already happened before and leading up to events in AD 70, and the so-called “Futurists” who have put most of the material into the future in the Endtimes. That has been because they both have an agenda and they therefore have to make everything fit into that agenda, come what may.

I can honestly say that my ‘agenda’ has only one item: To get to the truth and heart of the matter and try to get to what is the most likely explanation of each phrase and verse. With some verses, that is quite straightforward to do; with others, great patience is needed. I remember when I was writing the Book of Revelation commentary that in some instances I had to spend days or, occasionally, even weeks meditating on a phrase or verse, or even just a word – praying about it, determined to try and get to the kernel, nub, and nucleus of it, so that it would be *exegesis* rather than *eisegesis*.³ Some parts of this sermon of Jesus are like that too.

One must remember that chapters 24 and 25 represent a seamless whole. The chapter divisions (and verse numbers) were not in the original texts but were added many centuries later as helps.⁴ So one must remember that the three parables in chapter 25 are not merely tacked on to chapter 24 as an appendix in the way that people use mere “fillers” for a music album to make up the needed minutes. Those three parables provide a vital commentary on the material in chapter 24. It therefore stands as a complete unit of teaching.

² You can download this commentary at this link: <https://diakrisis-project.com/2025/03/12/second-edition-of-the-essential-apocalypse-is-now-available-as-an-e-book-in-pdf-format/> .

³ *Exegesis* is when one interprets something objectively, according to its true meaning. *Eisegesis* is when one creates one’s own pet interpretation, according to one’s own desires and what tickles one’s ears, regardless of the plain meaning of the text, or the context of it.

⁴ The chapter numbers were first added by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the 13th century, and the verse numbers were added by Robert Estienne in 1551. The first Bible to appear with chapters and verses as we know them today was in 1560 in what is known as the Geneva Bible.

It is also important to realise that the teaching in Jesus' words on the Mount of Olives uses what I call "Prophetic Typological Stacking", in which two or more historical events from the past and the future are reported on in the same breath, as it were – or in the same wording – because they involve the same spiritual principles repeated at key points throughout history – so that **the whole discourse weaves its way in and out of multiple events of the past and future which are typologically connected**. Sometimes, just one element is mentioned that typologically covers more than one historical event (e.g., the "abomination of desolation"). This is the nature of prophecy and typology. If one is not willing to grapple with and understand typology when reading such prophetic texts then one should not be reading them at all. There is a mosaic beauty in all this which is breathtaking.

Thus, there is no need to be enslaved by Preterism or Futurism, or any other '-ism'. For, like the Book of Revelation, the text really offers a bird's-eye view of history from the ascension of Christ to the second coming. This has really paved the way for me to make communicable sense of this powerful portion of Scripture. Because I not only want to understand it all for myself, but in such a way that I can communicate it clearly to others (which is at least as important as understanding it for myself). Once one realises all this, then a great many difficulties are cleared up.

In Jesus' presentation in Matthew 24, there are a few verses which seem at first to present major difficulties for faithful interpretation (for example, verses 15, 34 and 36) and, in chapter 25, verses 29 and 40 have been controversial. This has led to there being many different interpretations of those verses, which must be confusing to anyone studying this chapter. I have no intention of simply presenting the various views which have been expounded before by others and then leaving readers to make up their minds, which is what some commentaries do. That seems very insipid and ineffectual to me: Pointless too. I would rather not engage in this project at all than leave readers to decide between other people's ideas of various levels of dubiousness! For that would be a betrayal of my responsibility to expound this text for all that it's worth.

Thus, I have wrestled with those verses until I have found an interpretation that I can live with and enthusiastically get behind.

If I was the only one throughout history who had come to these conclusions, I would be very reticent to share them in a commentary for public consumption. But fortunately there have been others who have wrestled as I have – some in obscure academic papers which have the freedom to explore courageously – and who have come to similar conclusions, though maybe not providing as much general detail as a commentary such as this which is exclusively concentrating on just two chapters of the Bible.

Interpretation method is paramount. To quote two of my ‘Golden Rules of Bible Hermeneutics’: **One should always interpret a passage of Scripture according to its immediate biblical context; and in the case of hard-to-understand passages of Scripture they should always be interpreted in the light of other Scriptures which plainly have a bearing on, and relevance to, those hard-to-understand passages.** This is what I propose to do.

A massive undergirding theme in these two chapters of Scripture is demonstrating the revealing antithesis between the true and the false, the genuine and the counterfeit, the impostor versus ‘the real McCoy’ and the ability to discern between the two. So you have false Christs (24:4-5,15,23-26) versus the real Christ (24:27,30-31), false disciples (24:48-49; 25:2a,26-30;41) versus true ones (25:2b,21,23,34), false ‘parousias’ and the true one (24:26-27), and false prophets (v.11,24) contrasted with true prophecy (v.14).

I have therefore come to see these two chapters not so much as *merely* an eschatological discourse (although there is much about the time of the end in them) but as a valuable multi-part lesson for disciples of Christ in discernment, the absolute need to be ‘undeceived’ and, above all, in how to validate the reality of your discipleship and thereby be prepared to meet your Maker either at death or at the end of the age, whichever comes first – for enduring to the end is another of the signs which Jesus provides so you can validate your discipleship.

Lastly, I want to assure readers that throughout the writing of this commentary, I have been continually mindful of the warning given in Revelation 22:18-19, which I think is just as applicable to any other part of Holy Scripture.

Here ends my little introduction. Now let us start looking at the text.

Commentary on Chapter 24

Jesus' Initial Prediction Concerning the Temple (vv.1-2)

1. As Jesus left the temple and was walking away, His disciples came up to Him to point out its buildings. 2. "Do you see all these things?" He replied. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."

Having, for the final time, left the temple (where His severe condemnations of the Scribes and the Pharisees were recorded in Matthew 23), Jesus *"was walking away"* from it. The Greek word translated here as "walking away" (πορεύομαι, *poreuomai*) can also have a figurative meaning, "to die", in the sense of a real departure. In support of this, Thayer's Greek Lexicon states that it can be used *"metaphorically, to depart from life"*. The word was used that way by Jesus speaking of His death: *"The Son of Man goes away as it has been determined"* (Luke 22:22).

This metaphoric use of the word would be most appropriate in Matthew 24:1 because this was Jesus' final visit to the temple – a real departure. He would have known this and would have felt the fullness of the experience. There must have been some kind of real determination in His step as He walked away, separated from the temple for the last time, knowing very well what was to become of the temple and His own astounding role in superseding it – on which I shall not elaborate here but will do so when dealing with verse 15.

Into that determination came the admiring remarks of the disciples about the temple buildings. Mark says that they spoke of *"the magnificent stones and buildings"* (Mark 13:1), while Luke says that they were also *"remarking how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and consecrated gifts"* (Luke 21:5).

The way that the Lord Jesus responded must have totally bewildered them. "But this is the temple of God and it is beautiful! Every stone thrown down?" Yes, absolutely! That was vitally necessary to signal the absolute end of Old Testament Israel and the old covenant in which it was a partaker. In fact, the way that the razing of the temple to the ground happened in AD 70 and what took place in it prior to that is part of a cyclically recurring prophetic type, as we will see when we reach verse 15. (Yes, that mysterious verse 15 again!).

The Disciples' Triple Question About His Temple Prophecy (v.3)

3. While Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"

So they had made their way up the Mount of Olives. Although that sounds like a big mountain, in fact because Jerusalem is already at a fairly high altitude of around 760 metres (around 2,500 feet), the summit of the Mount of Olives — a rocky outcrop — is only about 100 metres (330 feet) higher than the temple area. So it would not have taken very long to get there, from which they would have had a superb view over that area.

Mark tells us that the disciples who came to Jesus privately consisted of just Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mark 13:3). Their question was a 'three-in-one', although the last two parts really meld into one. They wanted to know when the temple would be destroyed and what would be the sign of His coming again and of the end of the age. The rest of the chapter involves Jesus' very interesting response to that threefold question.

I say "interesting" because He combines and even conflates the destruction of the temple with His coming again and the end of the age. Some verses can immediately be identified as pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple; other verses refer to conditions throughout the entire age, and yet others refer to His coming again and the end of the age; whereas still others pertain to all of those elements, thereby showing them to be typologically connected. As I said earlier, "*There is a mosaic beauty in all this which is breathtaking*". It is the failure to trace the connections between these three events, past and future, which has led to the slavish adherence to either absolute Preterism or unmitigated Futurism. In fact, there is no need for any "-isms" other than truism and realism.

Events that Are Not Signs of Jesus Coming or of the End of the Age but are Continuous Throughout the Age (vv.4-8)

4. Jesus answered, "See to it that no one deceives you. **5.** For many will come in My name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. **6.** You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. These things must happen, but the end is still to come. **7.** Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. **8.** All these are the beginning of birth pains."

Throughout this chapter, there is a persistent thread concerning resistance to deception and awareness of signs (vv.4-5,11,23-26). Later in the chapter, that turns into a thread which involves readiness for Jesus' return and the day of judgement (vv.42,44,46,50). Discernment and preparedness are what are being called for in Jesus' teaching here – not just at that present time, or in the lead-up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, but throughout and right to the end of the entire age.

One also needs to realise here that although Jesus is replying to the four disciples, He will surely have known that His prophecy in this chapter would be recorded in the Bible which would be written during the ensuing decades, and He is therefore not drawing attention merely to what the four disciples would experience but to what all disciples throughout the age would come to read in the written edition. So when He says, "you" in this intensely prophetic context, that "you" (unless it is very obviously solely directed at the disciples who were His contemporaries) can also be those throughout the age who read the Bible, including you and me! This is why it is not imperative that all Jesus' words here had to be exclusively intelligible and applicable to the life experience of the disciples present when these words of Jesus were spoken. It is most important to understand this as it sheds much light on the fact that there is massive application of this teaching to people who lived in time periods beyond those of the disciples and their contemporaries. This is why it is so unnecessary (and foolishly Scripture-twisting) to shove it all into pre-AD 70 times. **Let us not forget that Jesus was creating Scripture in this chapter for disciples of the entire age from that day to the day of His return!**

As an example of that necessary discernment which I mentioned above, the very first thing which Jesus does is to counsel against being deceived, citing a plethora of charlatans falsely claiming messianic status as "christs" (vv.4-5); but disciples of Christ are not to be deceived by any of them. Other conditions will occur which are also to be expected: Wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, famines, earthquakes and (Luke adds) pandemics (Luke 21:11).

As Jesus states in v.6, the elements to which He refers in vv.4-8 are not themselves signs of the end but are plainly symptomatic of

conditions which will prevail throughout the entire age, including during the lifetimes of the disciples. In **verse 8**, Jesus speaks of them as being *“the beginning of birth-pains”*. So all these wars and rumours of wars and the other elements mentioned are all part of the *“beginning of birth-pains”*. That is a very interesting and pregnant (pun intended) use of the term by the Lord.

One thus has to see the present age (from Christ’s ascension to His coming again) in the manner of the final period of gestation of a foetus – like extended labour pains of a birth. What does such a gestation represent? It represents ultimately the birthing of the age to come, the regeneration of the cosmos. Just as the gestation of a human foetus has to go through stages which involve discomfort and increasing pain leading to the birth of the child, so the transition of this *“present evil age”* (as Paul called it in Galatians 1:4) has to go through a process involving increasing anguish and distress leading to the age to come, which will be populated by those faithful to God and His Christ. The closer to the end we get, the more the degree of the equivalent of ‘pain’, manifesting as exponentially increasing lawlessness, apostasy, chaos and degeneration, with a lack of altruism and compassion thrown into the mix, all climaxing in unimaginable corruption and wickedness.

Wars and rumours of wars – a manifestation of the corruption of human nature throughout this present evil age – are part of that anguish and distress, as are the famines and earthquakes mentioned by Matthew, along with the *“pandemics, fearful sights, and great signs from heaven”* mentioned in Luke 21:11. These disturbances are really all symptomatic of the transition from one age to another. Painfully so, like a child gestating and then being born. For it is as if the cosmos itself has some kind of ‘consciousness’ of its participation in the fallenness of the creation, which was actually implied by Paul when he said, *“The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until the present time”* (Romans 8:22) and has a longing for the resolution: *“The creation waits in eager expectation for the revelation of the sons of God”* (Romans 8:19) – the restoration of all things, including the resurrection to the fullness of glory of the children of God.

As Jesus says, none of all these elements are specifically signs of the end of the age and the immediate return of Christ in judgement but

are active throughout it, though exponentially increasing as the end of the age draws near, just like with the discomforts and pains of the gestation of a foetus, until the birth finally occurs and there is no more pain (cf. Revelation 21:3-4). This is why all the hysteria proclaiming “*The Endtimes are here! Jesus is about to return!*” every time there is a major earthquake or other catastrophe is so misplaced. All these morbid manifestations during this age are like uterine contractions which escalate increasingly as the end draws near, but they are not themselves definitive signs of the end.

Jesus then Describes Further Conditions on Earth which His Disciples can Expect Throughout the Age (vv.9-14)

9. “Then they will deliver you over to be persecuted and killed, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. **10.** At that time many will fall away and will betray and hate one another, **11.** and many false prophets will arise and deceive many. **12.** Because of the multiplication of lawlessness, the love of most will grow cold. **13.** But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved. **14.** And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Many try to force these verses to apply solely to the people of Jesus’ era and in the run-up to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70. But the text clearly speaks about being **hated by all nations** and that the Gospel **will be preached in all the world to all nations and then the end will come**. In Jesus’ day and in the few decades following, the disciples had not been hated by *all* nations, and the Gospel had not been preached to *all* nations either. Just like the conditions on earth mentioned in verses 4-8, the following verses 9-14 continue to lay out what will be the conditions on earth during this age between Jesus’ ascension and His second coming.

Bear in mind also, that just as the conditions mentioned in verses 4-8 will increase in intensity like the birth-pains of an expectant mother (cf. v.8), so also the conditions in verses 9-14 will similarly increase in intensity as the age goes by, rising to a climax when the time comes for Jesus to return, for that is the nature of things in this age. This exponential nature of dire conditions on earth throughout this age is not only shown in the image of the expectant mother and her pains but also when Jesus speaks about the *multiplication of lawlessness* in verse 12.

Paul the Apostle also hinted at this exponential “multiplication of lawlessness” when he said that “evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” throughout this age (2 Timothy 3:13). This is all part of the “mystery of lawlessness” which permeates this age, though it has been under some restraint from spiralling completely out of control until the time when that restraint will be (or maybe even now is already beginning to be) completely removed (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8), and all hell will subsequently break loose on an even tighter exponential curve, a major feature of which will be the revealing of the “man of lawlessness”, a.k.a. the Antichrist (about which I will have more to say when looking at verse 15 – yes, that pivotal v.15 again!).

What this exponential multiplication of lawlessness means, for example, is that if you are into some bad elements in this world, even opening the door to them out of unhealthy curiosity – unless one is rescued spiritually by Divine providence – then that curiosity will progressively escalate into some kind of base amorality, then into debauchery, then into despicable things, then into abominations, then into unmitigated evil, then into things that can only be described as diabolical and demoniacal, until one has been completely overwhelmed by the forces of darkness, yet all the while imagining that one is becoming super-wise and even ‘enlightened’, for this is how the terrible deception of evil operates in the human heart which has not been redeemed. They become ‘sitting ducks’ for demonic manipulation. **The associated lack of conscience, seared through repeated crushing, makes one impervious to recognising one’s own heinous depths of absolute malignity – a walking timebomb of iniquitous intent.**

So, we can see from verse 9 that the genuine disciple of Christ – the one who is always ready to proclaim truth without compromise – will be a (necessary) pariah in society. That hatred for truth and for the authority of Jesus the Christ (for that authority is what is implied in His name) will go through peaks and troughs throughout the age, though again increasing in intensity as the age goes by, in accordance with the principle set by the Lord Jesus concerning the labour pains of gestation.

Because of the stumbling-block of the Gospel, “many will fall away and will betray and hate one another” (v.10). Mark adds that “brother

will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise against their parents and have them put to death" (Mark 13:12). Luke writes, "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death" (Luke 21:16). Obviously, this is to greater or lesser degrees at different times in different places, rather than being continually at the same level of intensity; but it will also increase in intensity as the end draws near – especially during the time of the great tribulation at the end of the age (which will be dealt with later in this exposition) and, *ipso facto*, during the 'reign' of the Antichrist.

Additionally, we are told that "*many false prophets will arise and deceive many*" (v.11). Again, this is a condition which is in place throughout this age, from Jesus' ascension to His return, although again increasing in intensity as the age rolls by. Today, there are more false prophets in the visible church than in the secular world... and they are manifold in quantity, like a swarm of locusts on a field of fresh crops. These false prophets "*will deceive many*". **Reality check: Most professing "Christians" today prefer the siren song of a false prophet who sings to them about an alleged "revival" or false "miracles" rather than an uncompromising preacher of God's word.**

We also see that as a result of that "*multiplication of lawlessness, the love of most will grow cold*" (v.12). The Greek word used there which is translated as "most" is πολὺς, *polus*, which is a qualifying adjective determining abundance. In its context here, it implies that the potential for genuine love of the vast majority of people will be extinguished. We are talking here ultimately about the exhibition of mass psychopathic behaviour – a complete lack of compassion or empathy and the inability to truly love (the Greek word used in the text there is ἀγάπη, *agapē*, true love). Again, in keeping with the image of the labour-pains of an expectant mother, all this psychopathy will increase exponentially as the age goes by and as the end of it approaches.

A word of encouragement now creeps into the text. "*The one who perseveres to the end will be saved*" (v.13). **We see here that the perseverance of a saint all the way, despite all persecutions, horrors, and even threats of death is the great sign of salvation.** This means either persevering to the end of one's life or – if one is

still alive when Jesus returns –persevering right up to that moment. Luke additionally reports these words: *“By your patient endurance you will gain your souls”* (Luke 21:19). I hope that you will take these words to heart.

“This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (v.14). That there will be a signal time when the testimony of the Gospel is finished, thereby triggering immediately the time of the end, is precisely corroborated also in Revelation 11:7, *“When the two witnesses have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will wage war with them, and will overpower and kill them”*. As I explain in my 2024 commentary on the Book of Revelation, the “two witnesses” there are symbolic of the message of the Gospel being witnessed in all the world.⁵ When the testimony of that Gospel is complete, then all the hell of the great tribulation and the brief Endtimes will break loose, involving a mass slaughter of the disciples of Christ (which is also referenced in Revelation 13:7 and Daniel 7:25). You may think that such a pogrom seems unlikely. But no doubt the Jews, homosexuals, disabled people and gypsies in Germany thought the same thing before Hitler seized control. I can assure you that it is coming. This is what lies behind those words: *“the beast that comes up from the Abyss will wage war with them, and will overpower and kill them”*. It is this pogrom which will herald the end of the age.

The “Abomination of Desolation” and its Typological Significance at a Number of Points in History (v.15)

15. “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by the prophet Daniel” (let the reader understand)...

Having just said, *“and then the end will come”*, Jesus suddenly turns to a prophecy in the Book of Daniel about the *“abomination of desolation”* (e.g., Daniel 9:27; 11:31). In the Book of Daniel, this referred to the Seleucid king of the Hellenistic Syrian kingdom, Antiochus Epiphanes IV (c. 215 BC-164 BC), who violated the Jewish temple in 156 BC. According to Greek historian Diodorus,

⁵ You can freely download that book as a PDF here: <https://diakrisis-project.com/2025/03/12/second-edition-of-the-essential-apocalypse-is-now-available-as-an-e-book-in-pdf-format/> . There you will find my commentary about the identity of the two witnesses on pages 240-257.

“Antiochus sacrificed a great swine at the image of Moses, and at the altar of God that stood in the outward court, and sprinkled them with the blood of the sacrifice. He commanded likewise that the books, by which they were taught to hate all other nations, should be sprinkled with the broth made of the swine’s flesh. And he put out the lamp (called by them immortal) which burns continually in the temple. Lastly he forced the high priest and the other Jews to eat swine’s flesh”.⁶

This mention by Jesus of the “abomination of desolation” immediately after saying “*and then the end will come*” is of huge significance to His extended prophecy recorded in Matthew 24. **It is actually a turning-point and a kind of centrepiece of the entire chapter** which began with the mention of various conditions which will be extant throughout the entire age, from Jesus’ ascension to His second coming, and from verse 15 onwards begins to focus on the end of the age and His return in judgement, but linked back typologically with the Antichrist-themed prophecy about the “abomination of desolation”.

You can see why the words, “*Let the reader understand*” appear here, for there are many levels to these words. That is the equivalent of saying, “*Those who have ears to hear, let them hear*”. For that final judgement at the end of the age is prefigured by the judgement on Israel in AD 70, which Jesus had prophesied in verse 2 and was then questioned about by the disciples in verse 3. The disciples will have believed at that time that the destruction of the temple, Jesus return and the end of the age were one and the same thing. But there was to be a huge time lapse between the destruction of the temple in AD 70 and the end of the age and Jesus’ return. **This reference by Jesus to the “abomination of desolation” is the element which covers that span of time because it refers to more than one event.** It must do, because He says to the disciples, “***When you see standing in the holy place the abomination of desolation***”. This was not merely about what happened with Antiochus Epiphanes as laid out by Daniel (to which Jesus referred) but was also about something **which the disciples would themselves see**, namely, the entering of the temple by the Romans to destroy it in AD 70. **Jesus**

⁶ Diodorus Siculus, *Book 34*, §1.

is showing how these events involving the “abomination of desolation” are inextricably linked.

We are here in the territory of ‘types’, in which one event in history finds its mirror and fulfilment in another event of a similar nature. This is the “Prophetic Typological Stacking” to which I referred in the Preface, in which events separated by lengthy periods are actually linked together prophetically by a common theme, without referencing the lengths of time between them – in this case the common theme is the abominable desecration of the temple of God, a number of occurrences of which are ‘stacked’ together, though in reality separated by various periods of time, and **they all involve the same principle: Temple desecration.**

One has to acknowledge the existence of ‘types’ in prophecy, so that events themselves become harbingers of events yet in the future. For example, the children of Israel being rescued from Egypt under Pharaoh by Moses serves as a prophetic ‘type’ of the children of God being rescued by Jesus from the forces of darkness under Satan. The corollary of that event is the children of Israel entering the promised land flowing with milk and honey being a prophetic ‘type’ of the child of God’s entrance into glory. Then there was David as a ‘type’ of Christ defeating Goliath, a type of Satan. A great many more examples could be given – especially of Old Testament history serving as prophetic types of the life of the believer under Christ in the new covenant.

Right here in this sermon on the Mount of Olives there are historical events serving as prophetic types. For example, the “abomination of desolation” in the temple carried out by Antiochus Epiphanes in 156 BC finds its typological mirror and fulfilment in two later events in history: First, the desecration of the temple under the Roman general Titus in AD 70 and, second, the Antichrist of the Endtimes falsely setting himself up “*as God in the temple of God*” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Similarly, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in judgement in AD 70 finds its mirror and ‘type’ in the final day of judgement at the end of the age. Likewise, the evil careless days of Noah and Sodom find their mirror and ‘type’ in the evil of the days leading up to Jesus’ return (Matthew 24:37-39), as we will see in a later section further below. In fact, one can only understand these ancient events properly when they are seen in

their mode as 'types' for events which are even future for us. As even the secular phrase states, "*History repeats itself*".

So when Jesus says, "*when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination of desolation,' spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand)...*", He is already deliberately linking the Antiochus Epiphanes temple-violating event in 156 BC with the Romans desecrating the temple in AD 70, and the "man of lawlessness", the Antichrist, "*seating himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God*" in the future (2 Thessalonians 2:4). We know this triple-event time-link must be the case because a few verses later Jesus links this "abomination of desolation" with the time of "great tribulation" by saying "*at that time*" (Matthew 24:21) which although having a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, a terrible event, it is also clearly identified by Jesus with that "great tribulation" being just before the return of Christ (see the inference in Matthew 24:29-31), thus anchoring it in the Endtimes. We will come to that when we deal with the appropriate verses on the great tribulation later in this exposition.

Before going any further, I want to present an excursus which justifies linking the future revealing of the Antichrist with the prophecy of Jesus about the "abomination of desolation" here in Matthew chapter 24.

Excursus on the Antichrist Saying that he will Seat himself as "God" in the Temple of God

When the *actual* Antichrist, who Paul calls the "*man of lawlessness*", is finally revealed towards the end of this age, it is said that he "*will seat himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God*" (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Paul was clearly drawing on the prophecy about Antiochus Epiphanes in the Book of Daniel. However, the Antichrist seating himself in the temple of God obviously cannot be referring to the stone-built Jewish temple in Jerusalem because that has been definitively destroyed in AD 70 as God's way of showing that Old Covenant Israel and its system of worship was finished. Even if some Jews today (along with a load of so-called 'Christian Zionists' – a contradiction in terms! – thrown in for good measure) were to set up some kind of so-called "Third Temple" in Jerusalem, it would not be the genuine divinely-ordained temple of God but an utterly humanistic imitation, copy,

replica and counterfeit, because the Old Covenant is finished and has given way to the New Covenant in Christ (a much better one, in fact, as is specifically stated in Hebrews 7:22; 8:6!). **Let me just develop this a bit as it is important for us to realise that there can be no future temple of God which has been made with human hands. No matter how many temples are built by deluded humans in Jerusalem or elsewhere, they could not possibly be “temples of God” but temples of man.**

Just as the Old Covenant nation of Israel morphed into the Church, which became the new Israel, made up of both Jews and Gentiles (Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:3), meaning that the old Israel became redundant and was no longer extant, so the Old Covenant temple of Israel – where God is said to have dwelt – also morphed into the Church, which became the new temple of God through the indwelling Spirit (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:21-22; cf. John 14:23) meaning that the physical temple of God also became redundant just like the Old Covenant nation of Israel.⁷ However, the people of God can only be spoken of as being “the temple of God” because they are “*in Him*”, in Christ, as is specifically stated in Ephesians 2:21-22. Jesus the Christ Himself is the true temple of God today (as I will show further below); and, by way of extension, those who are in Him also partake in this ‘temple’. That is why the true Church is known as “*the body of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Therefore, neither the modern nation of Israel nor its physical temple made of stones can exist anymore as being from God. Any attempt to recreate those things can only be a humanistic, or even satanic, counterfeit. Thus, the future Antichrist “sitting in the temple of God” cannot possibly refer to him being in any physical temple, for no temple made with hands can possibly be a temple “of God”, where God dwells, but only a disgracefully counterfeit “temple”, an abomination designed by disobedient and therefore sinful human beings who are wilfully trying to recreate the past.

⁷ You can discover more about the redundancy of the modern state of Israel in my free eBook, “*Abraham our Father – Jerusalem our Mother: A Biblical Analysis of Judaism and the Modern State of Israel in Relation to the Church of Jesus Christ*”. You can freely download it at this link: <https://diakrisis-project.com/2022/12/06/new-entirely-updated-120-page-ebook-abraham-our-father-jerusalem-our-mother/> .

The original physical temple of God in Jerusalem is finished and done with by Divine decree, as embodied in the complete and definitive obliteration of that temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. "Complete and definitive obliteration" is the right phrase. The terrible extent of this obliteration of Jerusalem was recorded by the contemporary Roman-Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (c. AD 37 – c. AD 100) like this:

"But for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground, by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came there believe it had ever been inhabited".⁸

Therefore, for the Antichrist to be "seated in the temple/sanctuary of God" can only refer to him assuming the place of God and His prerogatives and privileges – attempting to take the place of God in counterfeit of Him. Let me develop this further.

When Paul (who will have known about the upcoming destruction of the temple, which happened less than a decade after he wrote 2 Thessalonians) says about the Antichrist, "*he will seat himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God*", this simply refers to the attempt, on the part of the Antichrist, to dethrone God and take His place (of which there could be no more futile action!). By way of illustration, the king of Tyre, also as a type of the Antichrist, is described by Ezekiel as claiming divine status by saying, "*I am a god; I sit in the seat of gods*" (Ezekiel 28:2). But this did not mean that he was actually doing so. It was an arrogant, illusory usurpation of Divine status. Paul was drawing on this prophetic Old Testament imagery in order to make his point clear to the readers of his time, for whom this Scripture would have been familiar.⁹ Just as Jesus' description of the Pharisees as sitting "*in Moses' seat*" was a reference to their professed (but usurped) power and authority (Matthew 23:2), so the reference to the "man of lawlessness" as sitting in the temple of God refers to his *usurpation* of God's power

⁸ Flavius Josephus, "*Of the War*", Book 7, Chapter 1. You can read that here: <https://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/war-7.html>.

⁹ See R.L. Harris *et al*, "*The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*", Moody Press, 1980, Vol.11, pp.411-412, for a revealing analysis of the Hebrew words *yashab*, "to sit", and *shebet*, "seat", in relation to God's dwelling place or tabernacle.

and authority – attempting to *put himself in the place of God*, and forcing himself on the world as a Divine ruler with no competitor.

Apart from there being no genuine “temple of God” anymore in Jerusalem (as it would be a retrograde step in covenants), the clinching factor proving that the Antichrist being spoken of as “*sitting in the temple of God*” cannot refer to a physical temple made with stones occurs in the context of Jesus’ saying to the Jews when they asked for “a sign” that He had the authority to cleanse the temple in Jerusalem of the profiteers who were selling their goods within it, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again*” (John 2:19). The Jews were naturally confused by this statement and assumed that He was referring to the physical building and said, “*This temple took forty-six years to build and You are going to raise it up in three days?*” John then states by way of correction:

“But Jesus was speaking about **the temple of His body**. **After He was raised from the dead**, His disciples remembered that He had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken” (John 2:21-22).

Essentially Jesus was saying that **since His resurrection He Himself is the dwelling place of God in its fullness and that the physical temple would thus be utterly redundant as the sanctuary of God**, which was just a temporary ‘type’ in the material world on which Israel at that time under the old covenant could concentrate for worship. **Therefore, Jesus the Christ Himself is now the real temple! To be “in Christ” (i.e., to be one of His disciples) is the only way to be ‘in’ that temple.** The truly spiritual person knows only too well that “*the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands*” (Acts 7:48), and that “*The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by human hands*” (Acts 17:24). This is basic spiritual knowledge “101”. Yet there are so-called “Christian Zionists” (an awful contradiction in terms) advocating the building of a third temple in Jerusalem for Jesus to return to and dwell in during their fictitious 1,000-year “millennial” reign of Christ on this earth.¹⁰

¹⁰ See this disturbing YouTube video of “Christian Zionist” pastor Greg Locke and his congregation in Lebanon, Tennessee, cheering on Israel to

Therefore, when it is said by Paul that the Antichrist *“will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship. So he will seat himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God”*, it is referring to the Antichrist’s attempt to counterfeit the returned Christ, to set himself up as the divine saviour of the world, which will be believed by all except those who are “in Christ”, the true Temple. This fits in with Jesus’s pronouncement in Matthew 24 concerning the time of the great tribulation:

“At that time, if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There He is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive even the elect, if that were possible” (Matthew 24:21-22).

This is precisely what the Antichrist, as a sorcerer, shaman and false ‘christ’, will do: *“The coming of the lawless one will be accompanied by the working of Satan, with every kind of power, sign, and pseudo-wonder”* (2 Thessalonians 2:9). So the Antichrist seating himself in the temple of God is all about counterfeit and not about being in an *actual* physical temple of God, for such no longer exists in the New Covenant as it would serve no useful purpose whatsoever. It would merely be a material building of the type which is known as a ‘folly’.¹¹

Despite also being an example of the “abomination of desolation”, it has to be said that there is a massive difference between the Antichrist’s desecration of “the temple of God” and those of Antiochus Epiphanies in 156 BC and Titus in AD 70. The difference is that the Antichrist is counterfeiting Christ whereas the other two were not. Antiochus and Titus were *literal* fulfilments of the “abomination of desolation” in the actual *material* temple of God of the time, whereas when Paul speaks of the Antichrist setting himself up “in the temple of God” that has to be a *symbolic* reference because there will be no such temple which is “of God” as that was

destroy Gaza, blow up the “Dome on the Rock” and build the “third temple” in its place. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/CNqBHj5YqG8>.

¹¹ Two definitions of a “folly”: “A costly ornamental building with no practical purpose” or “A building in the form of a castle, temple, etc., built to satisfy a fancy or conceit, often of an eccentric kind”.

definitively destroyed in AD 70. Antiochus and Titus desecrated the *actual* physical temple of God, which was then still extant, whereas **the Antichrist will commit his desecration of God’s temple by counterfeiting Christ who is now the true temple of God.** That is why he is described as seating himself “*in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God*”. He will have put himself in the place of the Divine Christ by way of counterfeit.

ἀντί [before *ἔν*, *ἀνθ’*; elsewhere neglecting elision] a preposition foll. by the gen. (answering to the Lat. *ante* and the Germ. prefixes *ant-*, *ent-*), in the use of which the N. T. writ. coincide with the Greek (W. 364 (341)); **1.** prop. it seems to have signified *over against, opposite to, before*, in a local sense (*Btm. Gram.* p. 412; [cf. Curtius § 204]). Hence **2.** indicating exchange, succession, *for, instead of, in place of (something)*. **a.** univ. *instead of*: ἀντί ἰχθύος ἔφην, Lk. xi. 11; ἀντί περιβολαίου

The clue lies in the actual word “Antichrist”. The Greek word ἀντιχριστος, *antichristos*, in the Bible texts, from which the equivalent English word “antichrist” is a direct

translation, is made up of two words, *anti* and *christos*. In Greek, the prefix *anti-* has two possible meanings, as Thayer’s Lexicon plainly shows: On the one hand, it is “*over against, opposite to*”, and on the other hand it is “*for, instead of, in place of (something)*”. [See the image extract out of Thayer’s Lexicon, above].¹² I firmly believe that both these ideas can be applied simultaneously to the “antichrist” as revealed in Scripture. He will be “against” and “opposed to” the true Christ, while at the same time setting himself up as being “in the place of” Christ in terms of being counterfeit.

The overriding concept of “antichrist” is, therefore, a diabolical power who both opposes and seeks to usurp God and counterfeit Christ and to establish his tentacular reign over the world, which, in reality, belongs to its Creator (Luke 4:5-6; Colossians 1:15-16; Hebrews 1:2). It is this “seeking to usurp God” and to counterfeit Christ which will characterise the Antichrist’s desecration of the temple of God. Of course, many wilfully ignorant and disobedient people will actually believe him to be the Christ, as I have said many times in previous works.¹³ Here ends the excursus.

¹² Joseph H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, T. & T. Clark, 1896, p.49,

¹³ See, for example, pp.326-358 in my commentary on the Book of Revelation, which you can freely download here: <https://diakrisis-project.com/2025/03/12/second-edition-of-the-essential-apocalypse-is-now-available-as-an-e-book-in-pdf-format/> .

Finally, remember the triple question of the disciples at the beginning of Matthew 24: *“When will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”* That ‘sign’ must surely be the “abomination of desolation”. For it fulfils the answer to all three parts of the question. When the “abomination of desolation” is standing in the holy place, one would know that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple are at hand. When they had breached the Temple, Titus’s forces planted their pagan idolatrous standards into the temple complex, and the Roman soldiers offered sacrifices within the Temple precincts. The “abomination of desolation” was right there in the temple. Shortly after that, it was all destroyed. Similarly, when one sees the Antichrist counterfeiting Christ and making himself out to be God – the final manifestation of the “abomination of desolation” – then the parousia of Christ and therefore the end of the age will not be far away (see 2 Thessalonians 2:8, which more than implies that).

Warnings to the Christians in Jerusalem About the Events surrounding AD 70 (vv.16-20)

16. ...“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. **17.** Let no one on the housetop come down to retrieve anything from his house. **18.** And let no one in the field return for his cloak. **19.** How miserable those days will be for pregnant and nursing mothers! **20.** Pray that your flight will not occur in the winter or on the Sabbath.”

After having presented a stacked triple-application typological reference to the “abomination of desolation” in verse 15, Jesus plainly refers in the five verses following to the situation in AD 70, just prior to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. It does seem as if the Christians did heed these warnings as recorded in Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History (iii.5) where it is said that the Christians of Judea fled to Pella, a town on the northern boundary of Perea, east of Jordan and Samaria. Josephus also speaks of many fleeing from the city. Luke adds: *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that her desolation is near... these are the days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written”* (Luke 21:20,22). He also adds *“And Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”* (Luke 21:24). Just as blindness in part will happen to Israel *“until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in”* (Romans 11:25), so the earthly city of Jerusalem will be *“trodden down by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”*. And then the end will come. There will be no restoration of the nation Israel

to the land — as that would be a backward covenantal step. It will simply be the end of this age.¹⁴ The “*times of the Gentiles*” refers to the Gospel Age which has so far been in force for some two thousand years, and which will one day be brought to a conclusion with the last judgement when Christ returns to enact it, to bring the history of this universe to a close and transform the cosmos into the new heaven and new earth. **The common assumption that there is something beyond the “times of the Gentiles” on the earth as it is currently constituted is an entirely false one.** The word “until” does not imply ‘then something else afterwards’ must take place on this present fallen earth. For example, Jesus must remain in heaven “*until the times of the restoration of all things*” (Acts 3:21); but there is nothing after that on this present earth! The “restoration of all things” refers to the restoring of the cosmos to a pristine, unfallen state in a new creation, the new heaven and new earth. **The notion that Christ will return to create a global Jewish autocracy as that restoration on this present earth is just an old Jewish fable being placed before disciples of Christ as a decoy, a diversion, and a distraction from truth.**

The Time of “Great Tribulation” and When it Occurs (vv.21-22)

21. “For at that time there will be great tribulation, unseen from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be seen again. **22.** If those days had not been cut short, no flesh would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short.”

That time of “*great tribulation*” spoken of by Jesus on the Mount of Olives cannot possibly refer *merely* to the Titus episode in AD 70 in Jerusalem because He says that the time of tribulation to which He is referring will be worse than anything seen “*from the beginning of the world*” and worse than anything which will be seen again (Matthew 24:21). There have been plenty of terrible times and events which have been at least as bad as and many even worse than what happened in Jerusalem in AD 70. **But the still future great tribulation associated with the “abomination of desolation” in Matthew 24:15 will be far worse than anything ever to have**

¹⁴ Again, for more on this whole subject area of Old Testament Israel in relation to the nation-state of Israel today, please read my eBook on this: <https://diakrisis-project.com/2022/12/06/new-entirely-updated-120-page-ebook-abraham-our-father-jerusalem-our-mother/> .

happened on this earth at any time. Nevertheless, Titus was still a forerunner, type, and prefiguration of the Antichrist to come (i.e., one of the 'mini-antichrists' referred to in 1 John 2:18) and, with Antiochus Epiphanes, he gives us a nasty taste of what the real Antichrist will be about. For the time of great tribulation which generally *will* be worse than anything will be that which is presided over by the Antichrist towards the end of the age when he runs riot against genuine disciples of Christ and sets up his autocracy over the whole earth. For it is those disciples who will be the only ones who will call the Antichrist out for who he really is, and who will refuse to go along with his global government and one-world religious interfaith jamboree. This is the same event that we can find referred to in a number of other places in Scripture. First here:

“As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days arrived and pronounced judgment in favour of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for them to possess the kingdom... He will speak out against the Most High and oppress the saints of the Most High, intending to change the appointed times and laws; and the saints will be given into his hand for a time, and times, and half a time” Daniel 7:21-22, 25).

Then here: *“When the power of the holy people has finally been shattered, all these things will be completed”* (Daniel 12:7). **Then here:** *“When the two witnesses have finished their testimony [which represents the witness of the Gospel by the church in the world], the beast that comes up from the Abyss will wage war with them, and will overpower and kill them”* (Revelation 11:7). **Then here:** *“[The beast] was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them”* (Revelation 13:7). That is the great tribulation.

Verse 22, *“If those days had not been cut short, no flesh would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short”*, states that the time of great tribulation will be cut short by God for the sake of His chosen ones, so that at least some would be preserved from being brutally exterminated. Maybe that refers to the preservation of the less robust and more sensitive of God’s people from having to undergo what will be a terrible experience, for those who are of a more robust nature will have willingly surrendered to martyrdom.

Prophecy of the Proliferation of False Messiahs (Christs) and the Necessity to Resist Them All (vv.23-25)

23. "At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There He is!' do not believe it. 24. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive even the elect, if that were possible. 25. See, I have told you in advance."

More warnings about deceivers and the need for discernment. Around the time of both the great tribulations – in the run-up to the fall of Jerusalem and the even greater one at the end of the age – there will be a proliferation of people purporting to offer salvation and hope, for that is what a messiah does. However, a false messiah obviously offers false salvation and false hope. Some of them can even perform pseudo-miracles to draw people in. A number of years ago, an Indian guru called Sathya Sai Baba, known as a "godman", regularly performed such things as:

"the materialisation of *Vibhuti* (holy ash) and other small objects such as rings, necklaces, and watches. He was also believed to have performed spontaneous healings, resurrections, and exhibited clairvoyant abilities. Additionally, claims were made regarding his ability to be in multiple places simultaneously (bilocation), as well as his omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience".¹⁵

This sort of satanic/shamanic jugglery will proliferate as the world descends into the chaos of the tribulational Endtimes. In fact, that time period will culminate in the ultimate "godman" pretender, the Antichrist, who easily fits Jesus' warning in our text of "false christs" as he "*will be accompanied by the working of Satan, with every kind of power, sign, and false wonder, and with every wicked deception directed against those who are perishing*" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). The deception will be so profound that even the less discerning of God's elect people could be taken in, if that were possible – though that could not finally be the case for them as they will persevere to the end and any deception would only be temporary. This is why it is so important to be well-informed and knowledgeable about how deception operates because it is very often in a manner you would least expect and by which you can very easily be blindsided.

¹⁵ This was extracted from the Wikipedia article on Sathya Sai Baba: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sathya_Sai_Baba .

The True Nature of the Coming of the Son of Man (vv.26-28)

26. “So if they tell you, ‘There He is, in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or ‘Here He is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. **27.** For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **28.** Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.”

Jesus now develops further His warnings about deception concerning false messiahs and their pseudo-parousias. I use that term deliberately because *παρουσία*, *parousia*, is the Greek word used for the “coming” of Christ in v.27. It is the standard theological expression used for the return of Christ event. In fact, the word “parousia” only appears four times in the Gospels and they are all in this 24th chapter of Matthew (vv. 3, 27, 37 & 39) and they all refer directly to the coming of Christ. **For this whole sermon of Jesus is ultimately pointing forward – as the fulfilment of all types – to the second coming of Christ and the importance of not being deceived by false claims of a *parousia* (e.g., that of the Antichrist, whose ‘coming’ is actually also called ‘parousia’ in the Greek in 2 Thessalonians 2:9) and the need to be ready for the real thing.**

This is an interesting contrast in the use of this word, *parousia*, in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians. In verse 1, Paul speaks of “*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*” and in verse 9 he speaks of “*the coming of the lawless one*” (a.k.a. the Antichrist). Both use the Greek word *parousia* – the two contrasting parousias – one for the true Christ, one for the ultimate false Christ, the Antichrist. There is an element in ‘parousia’ which implies arrival. One day, the Antichrist will indeed ‘arrive’ on the world stage, only to be removed from it not too long after that by the arrival of One whose power is infinitely greater than that of this counterfeiting satanic impostor (2 Thessalonians 2:8). This is what all of history is leading up to. To imagine that Matthew 24 only goes as far as AD 70 is to miss the point completely. Jesus’ teaching in this chapter would be terribly truncated if that were to be so. **The beauty and completion of this teaching is that AD 70 as the final judgement on Israel and the end of the age of Israel was just a typological introduction to the judgement on the whole world to bring history to a close and herald the new creation to come.** Without an acknowledgement and understanding of basic typology in Scripture, one cannot hope to penetrate what this chapter really means.

Jesus then describes two classic sources of false christ *parousia* claims as coming from: 1) “in the wilderness” and 2) “in the inner rooms” v.26). These terms are basically shorthand for 1) desert ascetics or off-grid gurus and 2) esoteric occult organisations, secret societies, and clandestine groups – all with their signature ‘saviour’ claims. In contrast with these pseudo-messianic setups which are hidden away from the world in deserts and in secret meetings/ teachings, Jesus describes His own *parousia* as being “as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west”. Nothing secret about that! In other words, His *parousia* will be global, discernible by all across the world at the same time, as we will see further below when we come to examine verse 30.

Then there is the enigmatic statement in **verse 28** that “*Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather*”. This must be some kind of idiom, though I do not think that in this context it is too difficult to understand. It has to do with ripeness for judgement.

Those of you who are familiar with my writings will know that I have spoken many times about the way that evil has to come to its head in order to be ripe for judgment. There are precedents for this in Scripture. One powerful example of evil having to come to its fullness to be ripe for judgement can be seen when Abraham was told by God that it was not possible to go in and possess the land at that time “*because the evil of the Amorites is not yet complete*” (Genesis 15:16). **Evil has to come to its fullness, its completeness, its head, its climax, its ripeness for judgement; and generally only then will God act.** As Christ said to the rulers of Jerusalem: “*Go ahead then, fill up the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the sentence of Gehenna?*” (Matthew 23:32-33). Only when that cup of evil has been filled up will God judge. There has to be a fulfilment of evil coming to its head before Divine judgement comes, because such judgement will always be in fulfilment of justice. God is not only a just judge but He will be *seen* to be just.

The “carcass” in the idiom denotes something being ‘ripe for the picking’. Thus, “*Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather*” is simply saying that when (the ‘carcass’ of) evil has reached the fullness of its ripeness for judgement, then at that moment the Supreme Judge will swoop in and mete out justice.

The Conditions Surrounding the Second Coming of the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ (vv.29-31)

29. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days: 'The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken'. 30. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31. And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

That first phrase, "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days*", followed by a description of the judgement of God and the return of Christ at the end of the age, proves that the "tribulation" being spoken of earlier in verse 21 – although having a passing reference in terms of 'type' to the time of tribulation in AD 70 – pertained ultimately to the great tribulation which will involve the coming of the Antichrist and a terrible pogrom against God's people. Then the pre-parousia dynamics will begin.

There are many who say that there cannot possibly be any Christians involved in the time of great tribulation at the end of the age as they will all have been "raptured" off the earth before that because (as they claim) the Scripture says that they "*have not been appointed to suffer wrath*" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). That is a terrible misapplication of Scripture! Like all cults and sects, the "rapture" folks have taken a phrase out of context, omitting the phrase following it which says, "*but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*". The wrath there is not referring to the suffering of the great tribulation but to the torment of hell. **The recipients of Paul's letter (and all disciples of Christ) have not been appointed for God's wrath resulting in hell but for salvation in Christ.** That is the plain meaning. The disciples of Christ who are alive at the time of the great tribulation under the Antichrist will indeed suffer terribly; and it is "*for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short*" (Matthew 24:22). The elect will be involved in the time of great tribulation. In fact, they will be the main focus of it, because Satan hates them and Satan's "man" will have perched himself on the world's throne.

Those references in v.29 of our text to the sun, moon, stars and powers of the heavens are drawn directly from words of Divine judgement in the Old Testament, notably from Isaiah, Ezekiel and Joel. That they are being used here in connection with the return of

Christ can be in no doubt whatsoever, as verses 30-31 clearly show. Yet many claim that these references to the sun, moon, stars and powers of the heavens are not to be taken at all literally but are merely symbolic of God's judgement in general, as they sometimes are in the Old Testament. However, while we cannot know *precisely* the order and manner in which the cosmos will disintegrate at the time of the end, the Apostle Peter corroborates that:

“The Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and its works will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to conduct yourselves in holiness and godliness as you anticipate and hasten the coming of the day of God, when the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements will melt in the heat” (2 Peter 3:10-12).
[emphasis added]

With that level of cosmic destruction, the conditions mentioned in verse 29 of our text are not to be dismissed as being merely metaphorical, as they are by so many. I was wondering why there are so many who wish to take away any nuance of literalism from that verse and render it wholly symbolic of judgement rather than meaning actual destruction or chaos in the heavens. There seem to be two equal and opposite errors involved in the exposition of such ‘apocalyptic’ texts, as they are known. First, there is *dumb literalism* (whereby even obvious symbolism is made to be purely literal) and second, there is *hyper-allegorisation* (by which one eradicates what should be taken literally by rendering it solely as metaphor).

A classic case of the *dumb literalism* is the way that the clearly symbolic “one thousand years” in Revelation 20 has been given a virtual cult following which is now believed literally by vast hordes, probably most, in the “Christian” scene. A classic case of the *hyper-allegorisation* is right here in our text in Matthew 24, in which the sun darkening, the moon not giving its light, the stars falling from the sky, and the powers of the heavens being shaken are dismissed as pure metaphor, with no room for any literalism, when one can easily picture such extraordinary occurrences in

some literal way being symptomatic of the impending disintegration of the cosmos at the time of the end.

When I applied some thought as to why this should be, I realised that the Preterists (who make Matthew 24 into a mashup solely about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 and the lead-up to it) have to make a metaphor out of verse 29 or there will be no world left in which their AD 70 notions could happen! Likewise, those who imagine that Jesus will return to set up a one-thousand-year reign over the earth from a cobbled-together temple in Jerusalem, like some Old Testament nabob, have to dismiss the possibility of the literal dissolution of the cosmos as shown in verse 29 or there would be no world left for Him in which to do that! This is why these texts (well, any texts really) should never be handled by people with a manmade bandwagon belief-system.

Then **verse 30** states: *“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”*. This is pure ‘return of Jesus at the end of the age in judgement’ talk. The statement that *“all the tribes of the earth will mourn”* is corroborated in Revelation 1:7, where we read that *“all the tribes of the earth will wail because of Him”* at the time of His return. The tribes of the earth refers to all those in all the nations of the earth who reject God and His Christ. **At Christ’s return, the people on the earth who have wilfully rejected God and His Christ will be filled with a kind of ‘remorse’. However, that ‘remorse’ will not be an expression of metanoic repentance but of extreme resentment.** It is important to understand this distinction.

We see perfect examples of this as a result of the judgements being poured out on the earth in chapter 16 in the Book of Revelation. When the fourth bowl of Divine fury was poured out, *“they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues; yet they did not repent and give Him glory”* (Verse 9). When the fifth bowl of Divine fury was poured out, *“men began to gnaw their tongues in anguish and curse the God of heaven for their pains and sores; yet they did not repent of their deeds”* (verses 10-11). When the seventh bowl of Divine fury was poured out, which had the most devastating effects on the cosmos, we read that *“men cursed God for the plague of hail, because it was so horrendous”* (verse 21). Not a trace of repentance but only

resentment and blasphemous cursing. So much for the oft quoted: *“What about giving them a second chance?”* The number of chances they had before the very end is immense. In a way, every waking moment is ‘another chance’. But their hatred for God and His Christ is infinitely greater than any potential spark of love or spiritual life that could be kindled in them. **Wilfully unbelieving hearts, with few extraordinary exceptions, generally harden progressively, like concrete spread thin on the ground. These are dead souls with seared consciences.**

In **verse 30**, the words about *“the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven”* is a most important identifier of Jesus’ return for the final judgement. Here I want to bring before you an excursus about these “clouds”, for they are of great eschatological significance, linking together the ascension of Christ and His return, which are the two ‘Christological bookends’ of the ‘shelf’ of this age

Excursus on the Significance of Clouds in the Return of Christ

The use of the image of clouds, or *“a pillar of cloud”*, occurs a great many times in the Old Testament to indicate the glorious presence of God (See Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19-20; 19:9,16; cf. Matthew 17:5). In one text, when Moses went to receive the ten commandments on Mount Sinai, it says that *“the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered it”*, thus demonstrating that **“the cloud” is synonymous with “the glory of the Lord”** (Exodus 24:16). In another example, regarding the tabernacle of the Israelites, we read, *“Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle”* (Exodus 40:34). Again, we see that “the cloud” is synonymous with “the glory of the Lord”.

I believe that the description of the ascension of Christ as Him disappearing into a cloud is the human perception of His absorption into another dimension, with the whole event saturated in the presence and glory of God. When John writes in Revelation 1:7, *“Behold, He is coming with the clouds”*, this is a beautiful echo of some words in the Book of Daniel which plainly refer to the ascension of Christ:

“In my vision in the night I continued to watch, and I saw One like **the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven**. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence” (Daniel 7:13).

Again, we see that “coming with the clouds” which is used by Daniel (no “up” is mentioned there) to refer to the ascension of Christ and by John to refer to His coming again. For the two events are intimately linked, with the interval of the *Age of the Ekklesia*, the Gospel Age, separating them. This being ‘taken up into a cloud’ as Christ transmuted into heaven is what the disciples witnessed, which was a one-time event of momentous supernatural proportions. It was, as Daniel said, “*the clouds of heaven*”, which is clearly the Divine presence. How could the disciples be expected to describe such a scene adequately?

When Jesus was transfigured and His face changed and His clothes turned white and “the cloud” of God’s glory enveloped the disciples, Peter was so beside himself that he was completely lost for words. The text specifically says that he hardly knew what he was talking about (Luke 9:33). That was not a material vapour-cloud on that mountain but the reality of God’s glory. When Jesus returns at the end of the age – and our text in Matthew 24 says that “*He is coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*” and in Revelation 1:7 it says, “*He is coming with clouds*” – does that mean that He will have to wait until there is a cloudy day, meteorologically speaking, as opposed to a clear one with a blue sky in order for it to happen? Of course not, as that would be ridiculous.

I think that we have turned Christ’s ascension and His return at the end of the age into a bit of a comic strip if we go for the ‘lift (US: elevator) rising into literal vapour-clouds and then out of them’ idea of His ascension and second coming. It is not a precise ‘reverse-video in location’ situation. So when the angels said that Christ will return in the same way that the disciples saw Him ascend to heaven, it means it exactly as it says in our text, “*He is coming on the clouds of heaven*”.

Furthermore, it does not mean that He will return to the same geographical location in Israel as that from which He ascended, which was in fact the Mount of Olives, for that is also a literalistic fantasy peddled today by modern judaisers. He does not have to come back to the Old Covenant land of Israel at all as He will be burning up this present creation and creating a new one. Israel was finished in AD 70, and that is how it will remain. **The Israel of God**

is the New Covenant *Ekklesia*, made up of both Jews and gentiles (Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:3).

Just as He was taken into the other dimension of heaven via the “cloud” of God’s glory, so He will return out of that same glorious “cloud”, except this time He will be seen across the entire globe simultaneously – for, as our text says, “*all tribes of the earth will see Him*” and as Revelation 1:7 testifies, “*every eye will see Him*” – even if, meteorologically speaking, it is a clear day (or night)! Vapour-clouds simply do not figure in the picture. **These are the “clouds” of God’s power and His great glory.**

After His arrest, when the high priest questioned Jesus, saying “*Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?*” Jesus replied, “*I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven*” (Mark 14:61-62). His ascension was, and His second coming will be, attended by the mindblowing manifestation of the presence of God, which we can only think of in terms of heavenly clouds, because any other attempt at its conception is beyond our current spiritual ‘paygrade’.

The ascension of Christ was definitely miraculous and supernatural and it was an interdimensional transition rather than an elevator trip through the sky ‘à la Superman’. If we *only* see it as Christ going slowly upwards into the stratosphere as if on an ‘invisible elevator’ and then getting lost in standard vapour-clouds on the way “up” to heaven, we do not do it justice in any way. What the disciples perceived was not so much a slow Superman-style elevator type of movement but Christ’s receding from them, albeit momentarily, as if He was going up and away. **But He wasn’t going into outer space. He was going to another place, another dimension!**

Obviously, He would not want to disappear instantly as if in an explosive puff of smoke. But heaven is not beyond watery physical clouds up above, whereas the Divine presence is like a mystical cloud when it is witnessed on or from the earth. This is what we see in the aforementioned scene known as ‘the transfiguration of Christ’ (Matthew 17:1-7), where we read that “*a cloud full of light enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!’*” Again, we see that the

cloud is a symbolic manifestation of the Divine presence, the glory of God, but it is *not* a vapour-cloud.

In the Book of Revelation, we see Christ carrying out the final judgement “seated on a cloud”: “*And I looked and saw a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was One like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand*” (Revelation 14:14). The crown and the sickle are symbols of rulership and judgement; but the cloud always represents God’s glory. The *Ekklesia* (symbolised in Revelation 11 as the “two witnesses”) will also be perceived as ‘going up in a cloud’ when their time comes to be resurrected: “*‘Come up here’. And they went up to heaven in a cloud as their enemies watched them*” (Revelation 11:12). That is *not* a vapour-cloud. **Whether one is going “up” to heaven or coming “down” from it (though there is really no “up” or “down” involved), that cloud will feature somehow, for that cloud is the Divine presence in all its mystery and glory.** The use of the word ‘cloud’ is the only way that we can express it. Similarly, we only use the terms “up” for heaven and “down” for Hades because we have no other way of expressing it, for either of those two is neither up nor down but other-dimensional! **Like Peter, whether we realise it or not, we are lost for words when it comes to trying to verbalise dimensional shifts.**

Paul also describes the resurrection of the saints with a cloud included, saying, “*The dead in Christ will be the first to rise. After that, we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). **I reiterate that this is not implying that the resurrection will have to keep being postponed until a cloudy day for it to happen!** These are the clouds of the Divine presence rather than *stratocumulus* or *nimbostratus*. Furthermore, the resurrection of the saints will not be a secret affair (as is claimed by those who believe in “The Rapture”) but will actually be witnessed publicly, to the astonishment of the rest of the world. In the same way that Jesus’s ascension did not involve Him instantly dematerialising before the eyes of the disciples who needed to witness it, so the resurrection of the saints to heaven will surely not be an instant dematerialization in a puff of smoke, as it were, but briefly gradual, in order to be witnessed by those who remain.

In Revelation 1:7 we read, *“Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him – even those who pierced Him”*. The fact that this text says that *“every eye will see Him”* is a clear indication that, with the second coming, He will *not* be taking an ‘invisible elevator’ down onto the Mount of Olives from the sky, for that is just a comic-strip-style fantasy. At His ascension, when the angel said, *“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven”*, he was referring to the fact that Christ will be coming to this dimension from the same glorious cloud of heaven which enveloped Him at His ascension in order to wind up this creation and collect His people. **It will be a cosmic, cataclysmic event to be experienced visibly by every human being across the entire earth at the same time.**

As Christ said Himself in our text, *“the coming of the Son of Man will be just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west”* (Matthew 24:27). It would have to be a universally-perceived return, as our text says that *“all the tribes of the earth...will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds...”* and, as is corroborated in Revelation 1:7: *“every eye will see Him”*.

Yes, every eye will see him, but not so much with physical eyesight. It does not matter if one will be walking outside, climbing Mount Everest in a blinding blizzard, cycling on a country lane, watching a soap-opera on TV in a pub, driving on a motorway at any speed, sowing seed in a rice paddy, going up a skyscraper in a lift, sunbathing on a sandy beach, caving in the Pyrenees, festering in a dungeon in a repressive ‘banana republic’, sipping Drambuie on a patio in Barbados, reading an ancient Islamic manuscript in Timbuktu, deep-diving on the coral reefs, holed up in a research station on Antarctica in the darkness of winter, being registered blind (therefore physically sightless), flying in an aircraft at 35,000 feet, exploring the Amazonian jungle, relaxing in a spa with a face-mask and cucumber slices on the eyes, on a diving expedition on the Coral Reefs, or lying asleep in bed.

Everyone without exception will see the Lord Jesus Christ when He returns. This is because it will not be merely a physical event but a supernatural one. Oh, how we need to get out of the literal into the supernatural! The ‘lightning flash’ of Christ’s presence out

of the divine “cloud” of glory will permeate every point of human consciousness on the planet. Instantly. Is that not just an utterly mindblowing thought? Here ends the excursus.

Verse 31 says, “*He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other*”.

Here there is even more proof that we are at the end of the age in this part of the chapter, for this is the day of judgement, in which there is a massive divinely-directed angelic involvement: “*He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call...*” (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 10:7; 11:15). How many angels will it be? Well, how many angels are there in total? Remember, they do not die. It could be many millions. Ten thousand times ten thousand is a number that is mentioned in Scripture (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 5:11). That is one hundred million. Whether that is literal or not, I do not know. But I do know that it is very many — “*myriads of myriads*”.

That trumpet call will heard by everyone across the whole earth simultaneously and it will be cataclysmic. Even now, strange supernatural sounds can be heard around the world as booming or trombone-like, sometimes called “skyquakes”.¹⁶ This is by no means an isolated incident because similar sounds are being heard all over the world at the present time. Imagine such a sound at the time of the end but infinitely amplified, as it will be when Jesus’ return is heralded — like hearing a cosmic *shofar*. That global supernatural sound will be accompanied by a myriad of angels being sent. In the parable of the wheat and tares, it is said:

“As the tares are collected and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. **The Son of Man will send out His angels**, and they will weed out of His kingdom every cause of sin and all who practice lawlessness. And they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:40-43).

¹⁶ Here is an audio example of those strange booming sounds: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/qEW1WBbPH4Y>.

And again:

“This will take place when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in blazing fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the penalty of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His might...” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

And in the next chapter in our text, chapter 25, it is said:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31-32).

That is the act of gathering *“His elect from the four winds [i.e., from north, south, east and west], from one end of the heavens to the other”*, His elect people from all time, whether living or dead.

Learning the Parable of the Fig Tree (vv.32-33)

32. “Now learn the parable of the fig tree: As soon as its branches become tender and sprout leaves, you know that summer is near. **33.** So also, when you see all these things, you will know that He is near, right at the door.”

The “you” there is you and me – all disciples of Christ over all time. Though it will be especially applicable for those alive when “all these things” have happened. For when they *have* happened, then we will know that Jesus is on the cusp of His return. As Luke recorded, just before he recounts the parable of the fig tree: *“When these things begin to happen, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near”* (Luke 21:28).

The fig tree is not a symbol of Israel, as I have heard it said. This has nothing to do with some kind of restoration of the old covenant nation of Israel, as some claim. It is simply a suitable metaphor denoting readiness. We cannot know the exact time and day in advance. But when all the things mentioned by Jesus are happening, then you know the end is likely coming up. Those things are the “abomination of desolation” showing himself (falsely) to be “God” (the revealing of the Antichrist as he

counterfeits the true Christ), the terrible time of great tribulation, and cosmic disturbances on earth and in the heavens. Only after all that has come to pass will Jesus return in power and glory to the earth for His people and in judgement at the end of the age. Even so, these are signposts and portents only. We will still not know the day or the hour.

The Identity and Fate of “this Generation” (vv.34-35)

34. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. **35.** Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.

The identification of the words “*this generation*”, has proved to be a real stumbling block to readers down the centuries. Many have felt obliged to explain it away in various needless ways. Even C.S. Lewis referred to this verse as the “*most embarrassing verse in the Bible*”.¹⁷ But it would only be an embarrassment to those who mistakenly identify the expression “this generation” as referring to the limited years-long experience of those who were present when Jesus spoke those words, along with all His contemporaries alive at that time. For then that would make Jesus speak an untruth, which of course is impossible. His humanity may limit a little the full extent of His knowledge for higher purposes in His incarnated life (as we will see in some detail when we look at verse 36), but that does not make Him into a liar! For if it were possible for such a thing to happen then we might as well all pack this in and retreat into nihilism and despair. For He said that this generation would not pass away “*until all these things have happened*”.

All those things in the verses running up to this statement include wars and rumours of wars, famines, earthquakes, pandemics, the multiplication of wickedness and the associated love of most growing cold, the preaching of the gospel in all the world, the desecration of the temple of God in both AD 70 and when the Antichrist will be revealed, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, the great tribulation, a profusion of false ‘Christs’ and false prophets, the parousia of Jesus at the end of the age, terrible signs in the heavens and the day of judgement. It is obvious

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night, and Other Essays* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p.98.

that the limited contemporary ‘generation’ of Jesus’ day passed away long before many of those things happened.

Of course, theological liberals love to seize on this verse as proof that Jesus was not Divine and had made an untruthful prophetic statement, thereby showing Himself to be a false prophet who made mistakes. But instead of coming to that conclusion and settling for the denigration of the Lord Jesus, or twisting the previous Scriptures by irrationally bundling them all into the past, the faithful student of Scripture takes the view that the Greek word translated as “generation” in this verse must have some other meaning than merely the time period of Jesus’ contemporaries. That is just logic. Therefore, being faithful to the rules of good hermeneutics that:

“...one should always interpret a passage of Scripture according to its immediate biblical context, and in the case of hard-to-understand passages of Scripture they should be interpreted in the light of other Scriptures which plainly have a bearing on, and relevance to, those hard-to-understand passages...”.¹⁸

...we need to ask the question, “*Is the phrase ‘this generation’ used anywhere else in the biblical context in which it occurs here in Matthew 24:34?*” And, if so, “*are there any other Scriptures which can shed any light on the term “this generation” as used here?*” The answers are a resounding “yes” and “yes”.

In fact, the term “this generation” in various forms has been used by Jesus throughout the Gospel of Matthew (11:16; 12:41-42; 12:45; 17:17) and it even appears right near the end of the previous chapter 23 in verse 36, as well as using the parallel phrase “*generation of vipers*” in that chapter (verse 33). Remember that hardly any time has passed between Jesus speaking in the temple for the final time, as recorded in Matthew 23, and arriving on the Mount of Olives to give the talk recorded in chapters 24 and 25. It was less than a mile, so not a very long walk since He last used the expression “this generation”, allowing for pauses along the way

¹⁸ These are two of my five “Golden Rules of Bible Hermeneutics”, which you can find here: <https://diakrisis-project.com/2023/08/02/keys-to-heaven-the-real-ministry-of-binding-and-loosing/> .

and climbing the Mount itself (which, at its summit, was only 100 metres, 330 feet, higher than the temple area).

"This generation", also spoken of as "*a generation of vipers*" (literally poisonous snakes), harks back to the idea of 'the seed (or offspring) of Satan' (who is the "old serpent") referred to in Genesis 3:15. As Jesus said to the Jews who claimed to have Abraham as their father, "*You are of your father the devil*" (John 8:44). Indeed. The seed/offspring of Satan – part of the "generation of vipers". The expression here, "this generation", is just an alternative way of speaking about the seed of Satan which has always existed since the time of the Fall (as induced in the Genesis narrative by the 'poisonous serpent' Satan) and will continue to exist right to the end and shall not pass away until all the events mentioned by Jesus have taken place, just as He said in Matthew 24:34. Then judgement will fall. In fact, even the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba will rise up in judgement against "*this generation*" (the actual words used) – the seed/offspring of Satan – on the day of judgement at the time of the end, as Jesus specifically said in Matthew 12:41-42. **The judgement on "this generation" at the time of the end, as referred to there, cannot possibly be referring solely to those who were alive in Jesus' time and who were His contemporaries.**

Therefore, the phrase "this generation", as used by Jesus in our text, cannot merely refer to everyone alive in Jesus' day and during that era but refers rather to the "seed of Satan" in opposition to the "seed of the woman" (i.e., those who are the children of God and the body of Christ) over all time. This is the 'antithesis' which John speaks of when he uses the terms "*the children of God*" and "*the children of the devil*" (1 John 3:10). The children of the devil are the "generation" (of vipers) of which Jesus speaks, though obviously with the emphasis on those of that present crowd around Him who were impostors in the Jewish scene and who directly opposed Him. But *that* generation – that strain of evil children of the devil and generation of vipers – goes right back to the killing of righteous Abel and the slaughter of Zechariah, and all the other righteous blood shed upon this earth (as Jesus showed in the temple earlier in the day, as recorded in Matthew 23:35-36, before His sermon on the Mount of Olives), of which Jesus' contemporaries among the Jews were just the latest representatives of a long line of reprobates going right back to the earliest of times.

Thus, “generation” (Greek, γενεά, *genea*) in Matthew 24:34 refers to a whole type of people sharing similar characteristics, which is an alternative translation of the word, as shown in all the best Greek-English lexicons. The Greek word *genea* has to be seen against other uses of the word to refer to a crooked and perverse nation (cf. Philippians 2:15). It wasn’t only Paul’s generation, or Jesus’ generation, who were crooked and perverse. It was “those outside” generally who were not to be trusted – unbelievers and enemies of truth, as it always is throughout time. That was the class of persons to whom that term “this generation” is referring. The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek states that *genea* also has the meaning of “kind” or “class”.¹⁹ For *genea* can also mean “a race of men very like each other in endowments, pursuits, character; and especially in a bad sense” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon). A classic use of *genea* to refer to a type of people occurs in Luke 16:8: “The sons of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the sons of light”, where “kind” is a translation of the word in our text, *genea*. **So *genea* can and does refer to a type of people with shared characteristics.** One simply has to be sure to apply it in the right context. The Topical Lexicon in BibleHub states this:

“The term refers to a lineage or cohort linked by birth, **but Scripture broadens it to any identifiable group bound by time, heritage, or shared moral traits.** Context decides whether the emphasis is chronological (successive descendants), contemporaneous (people now living), or qualitative (those marked by particular spiritual disposition)”. [emphasis added]

The context in our text demands that the emphasis there is “qualitative”. Even Google AI understands this reference: “*Genea* refers to a group with shared characteristics, often used negatively to mean a ‘kind’ or ‘race’ of people (e.g., ‘a wicked generation’)”. That last reference is to the Scriptures which, for example, speak of “a crooked and perverse generation” (Philippians 2:15), or “an evil and adulterous generation” (Matthew 12:39; 16:4), or a “faithless and perverse generation” (Matthew 17:17), or “this twisted generation” (Acts 2:40). It was not only that time period of thirty years around Jesus’ earthly

¹⁹ Franco Montanari, *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Koninklijke Brill, 2015), p.422.

era which had those who were evil, perverse, crooked, adulterous, faithless, or twisted – although they were certainly representative of it. **“This generation” of reprobates has existed from the time of the Fall and will do so right through to the end of the age.** This is why He said that such a generation would not pass away until all the things that He mentioned (which include Endtime things) have happened. These evil, perverse, crooked, adulterous, faithless, and twisted people who are under the power of Satan and who vigorously oppose God and His Christ *“will not pass away”* until all the things in Matthew 24:4-31 have happened, just as Jesus said in verse 34.

In fact, the Old Testament background to all this talk of “generations” and “vipers” goes back to the “Song of Moses” in Deuteronomy 32, which Paul was quoting in Philippians 2:15. First, there is this: *“His people have acted corruptly toward Him; the blemish on them is not that of His children, but of a perverse and crooked generation”* (v.5). Then this: *“He said: “I will hide My face from them; I will see what will be their end. For they are a perverse generation – children of unfaithfulness”* (v.20). And with an oblique reference to a “generation of vipers”, Moses in his song speaks about *“Their wine is the venom of serpents, the deadly poison of cobras”* (v.33). So those descriptions are not unique to Matthew 24:34 but are the culmination of a whole raft of Scriptures which refer to those who oppose God and, ultimately, His Christ. And this “generational” thing does not only apply to disobedient Israelites at the beginning of the first century AD but also to the whole unbelieving and hostile hordes in the world in general over all time.

So, taken in parallel with Matthew 24:35, the gist in v.34 is that while heaven and earth will pass away (to be replaced by a new heaven and new earth), Jesus’ words will not. Likewise, the children of the devil both within and outside the visible church (“this generation”) will not pass away until all the prophecies mentioned by Jesus in the verses prior to verse 34 have happened. They will be preserved until then and subsequently judged.

Interestingly, that is also precisely the gist of the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13. When the servants asked the sower of the seed about getting rid of the tares (the plant known in Greek as *zizania* and in English as Darnel, or its genus name *Lolium*

temulentum which in initial stages appears to be very much like wheat), 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?', he said, 'No...if you pull the tares now, you might uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest'" (vv.28-30). This is because people can be very deceptive and we are not equipped to deal with that kind of judgement, discerning the hearts of everyone as to whether or not they are a child of the devil or of God. Not only are there countless false "Christians" in the visible church but even so-called "good pagans" can externally seem like lovely people and can fool others into thinking, "Well maybe they *are* saved really in some way".

Later, when He explained the parable, Jesus said, "*The field is the world, and the good seed represents the sons of the kingdom. The tares are the sons of the evil one [children of the devil, the bad seed], and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels*" (vv.38-39). So there is that Antithesis again from Genesis 3:15. The two seeds: The children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one. But the children of the evil one (the equivalent of "*this generation*" in Matthew 24:34 and the "*generation of vipers*" elsewhere) are not to pass away until the end has come, whereupon they will be judged and cast into the lake of fire. As Jesus said in this parable:

"As the tares are collected and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of His kingdom every cause of sin and all who practice lawlessness. And they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv.40-42).

Do you see the parallel? "*Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened*", so that the 'two seed' issue will continue right through to the end of the age. Then that generation of reprobates *will* pass away... in just judgement.

About the Son not Knowing the Time of His Return (v.36)

36. "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father'.

In **verse 36**, the Lord Jesus makes a very interesting statement. He says that no one knows about the day or the hour of His return to bring in the day of judgement and the end of the world, not even

the angels in heaven, nor the Son, **but only the Father**. That is a very enigmatic statement because it ascribes a lack of knowledge of this to Himself, who is very God of very God. How can this be? Here one has to understand the difference between His human and Divine natures. Thus, rather than showing that He is not at all Divine (as the fourth century Arian heretics gleefully asserted), this verse brings us vital information that Jesus really and truly had a human nature, which was imperative in order for humans to be saved. Let us go into this a little more deeply.

We are dealing here with the mysterious interaction between Jesus' human and Divine natures. It is important to realise that in His human nature, as Mediator, Jesus was not wholly and absolutely omniscient. For example, in Luke 21:18-19, we see that Jesus was hungry and approached a fig tree to see if it had figs, but when he reached the tree there was nothing but leaves on it and no fruit. He did not know that until He reached the tree. This is not evidence of His 'lack of Godness' but indicative of His genuine humanity. This is how the eye of faith interprets such passages rather than running headlong into unbelief and heresy.

If we examine carefully what is being taught about all this in Philippians 2:3-9, we will see that Christ "empties" Himself of the absolute fullness of His Godhood, takes the form of a servant, is obedient to death, and is thereby exalted and given the Name which is above every name. Here we can cite one of the most beautiful analogies of cosmic spiritual history: **Whereas Satan (who, along with the other angels, was supposed to be a servant to God's human creation, Hebrews 1:14) set himself up against God in order to become the usurping ruler of the cosmos, Jesus the Christ, the Logos and the King (the real ruler of the cosmos) and very God, willingly humbled Himself, by manifesting in human flesh (the equivalent of being "a little lower than the angels", Hebrews 2:9), in order to serve and save human beings from their lawlessness, death and subjection to the forces of darkness.** Whereas Satan was not willing to serve, Christ was; and, in doing so, He brought about the defeat of the very one whose pride prevented him from being a servant.

Christ came to this earth so that He could be treated as the scum of the earth who was betrayed by all and who even one of His closest disciples would deny. His humiliation had to be complete:

Crucified on a stinking rubbish dump, utterly forsaken – for out of that humiliation would come the pinnacle of redemption (for that is the nature of the spiritual paradox). While in His earthly incarnation He was God, yet, in some extraordinary manner, He set aside the *fullness* of the power of that ‘Godness’ – emptied Himself of it – in order to perform the task which He came here to do. Thus, Christ,

“existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be held onto, but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

Theologians can argue about the minutiae of those amazing words. However, I do not have any time for pedantry. It is pretty obvious what those words mean. Yet people get so worried about using a ‘religiously incorrect’ word or two that they dare not state the obvious. There is much mystery here. Leave it at that! I have no idea how it was even possible for God to become a man, in terms of the physics and metaphysics. That in itself is a puzzle enough. But His becoming a man did not undo His ‘Godness’. Do not ask me how; but it obviously did not. I do not need some inadequate formula to state that. I just accept all this for the extraordinary mystery that it is.²⁰

Thus, these words in Matthew 24:36 – in which Jesus reveals that even the Son had no knowledge *at that time* about the day and hour of His return in Judgement at the end of the age – were simply a frank admission about the limitations regarding His human nature. It was expressly necessary that He should have a genuine human nature (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22), as it is revealed:

“Now since the children have flesh and blood, **He too shared in their humanity**, so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil...For this reason **He had to be made like His**

²⁰ If, as a parallel, you would like to read an article proving the Divinity of Christ, please do so here: <https://diakrisis-project.com/2024/06/24/the-divinity-of-christ-proven-a-sermonic-exposition/> .

brothers in every way, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, **in order to make atonement for the sins of the people**" (Hebrews 2:14,16-17).

Atonement had to be made by a man but it would have to be a sinless man. God taking on a human nature was the only way that this would be possible. Adam's sin was imputed to the whole human race (Romans 5:12-21), so our sin is imputed to Christ to do away with on the cross if we believe, and that Christ's righteousness is then imputed to the one who becomes His disciple in a beautiful exchange. That is how Paul can say that *"God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was treated as a sinner on the cross in the place of His people (John 10:14-15).

While exercising His earthly ministry, Jesus' Divine nature was not right out there in the forefront. It was not supposed to be. He was *"the man Christ Jesus"* (1 Timothy 2:5). His humanity was for real. From time to time we get a huge example of that. For instance, His temptation in the wilderness was for real (Matthew 4:1-11). It wasn't just a skit. The temptation was real. It had to be. *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). He was still Divine but He had set aside the fullness of His Deity while He walked this earth. So even though technically He could say, according to His Divine nature, *"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30), as far as His human nature was concerned, there was a subordination involved so that He could also say, *"The Father is greater than I"* (John 14:28). Similarly, He said *"Truly, truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself, unless He sees the Father doing it. For whatever the Father does, the Son also does"* (John 5:19). There were indeed occasions when the Divine nature also shone gloriously through. For example:

- ❖ When He quieted the wind and the waves (Matthew 8:26-27).
- ❖ When He claimed power through other miraculous deeds and in raising the dead.
- ❖ When He exclaimed, *"Before Abraham was, I AM!"* (John 8:58-59), using the name of God from the Old Testament and for which the Jews wanted to stone Him to death as they knew the implications.

❖ When He claimed that He had the power to forgive sins which only God has (Mark 2:5-10).

❖ When He was ‘transfigured’ in front of the disciples (Matthew 17:1-9).

These were some of the glimpses of His Divinity. Nevertheless, He set aside the total *fullness* of the power of His ‘Godness’ when He walked this earth as a man so that, ultimately, He could be humiliated and increasingly assailed by the forces of darkness as His crucifixion loomed – the climax of His experience in His human nature (which took place only three days after this teaching of His on the Mount of Olives), yet able to successfully undergo it and gain the victory because of the glory and power of His Divine nature.

So, yes, Jesus was limited in certain ways during His earthly ministry because of His wholehearted embracing of His human nature. One of those ‘certain ways’ was in not knowing, during His earthly incarnation, the time and day of His return. **However, after He had been resurrected it was a very different story.** For then He could say to the disciples, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me*” (Matthew 28:18). Once His ascension “*to His Father*” (John 20:17) ratified that authority, then there would be no more necessity for such limitations.

The Conditions of Noah’s Day (and the Resultant Judgement) which is Repeated at the End of the Age (vv.36-41)

37. “As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man.

38. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark. **39.** And they were oblivious until the flood came and swept them all away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. **40.** Two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. **41.** Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.”

Here we have another example of the “Prophetic Typological Stacking” I have mentioned earlier, where two or more historical events from the past and the future are reported on in the same breath, as it were, because they involve the same spiritual principles. The culmination of evil in Noah’s day, followed by the judgement of the Flood (Greek: κατακλυσμός, *kataklysmos*, the origin of the English word “cataclysm”), will be repeated at the end of the age – the culmination of evil which is followed by Divine

judgement, though not with a flood but with a conflagration. Jesus explicitly states, *“As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man”*. The burgeoning of evil and the subsequent judgement in Noah’s day was a ‘type’ of the conditions which will prevail towards the end of the age. In Luke’s gospel, it is also stated:

“It was the same in the days of Lot: People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But on the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like that on the day the Son of Man is revealed”.

So the debauched and amoral conditions in Sodom, followed by the Divine judgement on it also represented a ‘type’ of the conditions at the end of this age and the subsequent judgement meted out by God. Therefore, if we want to have a composite picture of what the conditions on this earth will be like in the run-up to Jesus’ return, we only have to compare what the conditions were like in Noah’s day and in Sodom.

So what exactly was the state of the world in Noah’s day and in the days of Lot in Sodom? As the Scripture reveals about Noah’s day, *“the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was altogether evil all the time”* (Genesis 6:5). As if that was not damning enough, even more graphically another Scripture reveals that: *“The earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and full of violence. And God looked upon the earth and saw that it was corrupt; for all living creatures on the earth had corrupted their ways”* (Genesis 6:11-12).

If you couple all the above mayhem with the demonic interference in the genetic makeup of humans which is recorded in Genesis 6:1-2 – when fallen angels, as demonic *incubi*, having manifested in human form (a serious spiritual crime to which Jude referred when he spoke of *“the angels who did not stay within their own domain but abandoned their proper dwelling”*, Jude 1:6), impregnated human women on earth, which was a kind of early form of Transhumanism²¹ – and the proliferation of the resultant human

²¹ If you want to know more about the philosophy (some would say religion) known as Transhumanism, see this article on my website:

mutants (i.e., the Nephilim, a kind of Posthuman), you begin to get an idea of what life on earth will also be like at the end of this age in the run-up to when the Christ will return.²² For He said that it will be like the conditions on earth in the days of Noah when people were carrying on like that and yet were completely unconcerned about the debauched state of their society.

The Lord Jesus also said that in the run-up to the time of His return, conditions would not only be like they were in the days of Noah, but they would also be the same as they were *“in the time of Lot”* (Luke 17:28). So what were things like in the time of Lot? Well, the sins of the city of Sodom, where Abraham’s nephew Lot lived, were *“so grievous”* that God set out to destroy it. Apparently, there were not even as many as ten righteous people out of the thousands who lived there (see the whole section in Genesis 18:16-33). When some angels were staying with Lot, *“all the men of the city of Sodom, both young and old, surrounded the house”* – presumably because they were highly attractive – and demanded that they be sent out so they could gang-rape them (Genesis 19:4-7).

So, that is how it was in the days of Noah and in the time of Lot: Utter debauchery, rampant demonism, genetic corruption and the creation of mutant superbeings (primitive Transhumanism), gross sexual perversion, unbridled evil beyond description, and unfettered godlessness, added to the fact that the people were just “oblivious” (Matthew 24:39) to their decadence. Are those characteristics not also the leading ones of our own time. And if you couple that with the link between the creation of mutant superbeings in Noah’s day and the planned Transhumanism of our own time – trying to achieve perfect health and even attempting to overcome death by making oneself (falsely) a new creation – to what conclusions can you then come?

What is always extraordinary to consider is how quickly debauched and evil conditions can deteriorate to such a level that

<https://diakrisis-project.com/2025/07/30/the-usurpation-of-gods-transformative-powers-through-the-cult-of-transhumanism-unabridged-and-wholly-expanded-with-bang-up-to-date-research/> .

²² In fact, those demons did that to those women – unsuccessfully, of course – in order to try and corrupt the bloodline which would lead to the birth of Jesus.

a massive dose of Divine judgement becomes necessary. What we need to realise is that it does not take very long for human evil, lawlessness, and the degeneration which results from it to permeate the world. Between the debacle in Eden and the evil-addled world at the time of the Flood there was merely a time period of around 2000 years. (Some place it at 1656 years at one end of the spectrum, while others – working from the Septuagint – place it at 2,200+ years). That is all the time it took for the exponential degeneration to take place. So far, the exponential degeneration of the present age since Jesus' ascension has been a tad short of 2,000 years, during which evil people and impostors have indeed gone from bad to worse and lawlessness has multiplied (2 Timothy 3:13 with Matthew 24:12). Now it all seems to be speeding up, like a runaway train about to derail, which has been especially assisted by advances helpful to lawlessness, such as in I.T., communications systems and technology.

Now you may say, *"But Jesus didn't say anything about how evil the people were in the days of Noah. He simply showed them as going about their daily business"*. He didn't have to say anything about their evil behaviour. It has already been logged in Scripture, as I showed above. **What He did was highlight how, in spite of their evil, it just didn't bother them. That was the added information that Jesus brought to the table here:** That the people in Noah's day went about their normal daily business without any acknowledgement that *"the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was altogether evil all the time"* (Genesis 6:5). **There is one thing that is worse than behaving in an evil manner: That is having no concern whatsoever that one is doing so, for it implies a terrible hardness of heart and deadness of soul.** It is this that Jesus was revealing in these verses here.

In **verses 40-41**, we read, *"Two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left"*. The context here is clearly the second coming of Christ ("the coming of the Son of Man"), of which He had just been specifically speaking in verses 30-31 and 36-37. Christ is comparing that time to the time of the judgement of the flood and how similar many elements will be when comparing those days with the day when Christ will return. Amazingly, many apply this text to a

secret “rapture” prior to the great tribulation – even in ‘respectable’ academic commentaries! However, **it is about what happens in the resurrection at the globally-witnessed return of Christ**, for openly “*every eye will see Him*” (Revelation 1:7). The unbelieving, scoffing people in Noah’s time were oblivious of the impending judgement but were then “**swept away**” by the flood as a result of that judgement. Similarly, when Christ returns, there will be those who are “**taken away**” into judgement and those who will remain under the protecting hand of God and spared from such judgement. **It is a classic case of the kind of parallelism which one finds throughout the Bible.** The parallelism here is between those who laughed at Noah (and were “swept away”, v.39) and those who have rejected Christ (and were “taken away” to judgement, vv.40-41). The scoffers of Noah were “swept away” by the flood and the disbelievers in Christ will be “taken away” for judgement. I hope you can see the parallelism here.

These two verses are used as a classic ‘proof-text’ for the ‘rapture’ by its promoters. Those who have been deceived by this “rapture” teaching think that those in the text who will be “taken away” are the raptured ones while the unbelievers will be “left behind” (which is the title of a heretical book and movie series about this). **But if one looks at it correctly in its “swept away”/“taken away” parallelistic context, then one will discover that it means exactly the opposite!** So many cultish ideas develop when people take a small portion of scripture out of context. Let me repeat it again so that it sinks in: In this text, the ones who are said to be “taken” are not disciples of Christ being ‘raptured’; they are those who are *not* His disciples, and are in fact being taken by God to judgement – the exact opposite of what the ‘rapture’ fantasists claim!

The Necessity of Preparedness for the Day of the Lord (vv.42-44)

42. “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day on which your Lord will come. **43.** But understand this: If the homeowner had known in which watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. **44.** For this reason, you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect.”

It is a singular fact that, generally speaking, the Church has lived in the expectancy that Christ could return at any time. This is in spite of the fact that there are certain events which must happen

first before that could take place: Namely, the fulfilment of the great apostasy and the revealing of the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). However, with the apostasy, it is always difficult to discern when that would have reached its climax. When is 'bad' at its worst? One could keep thinking, "It couldn't get any worse!", but it inevitably does (until it doesn't!). As to the revealing of the Antichrist, although that will be a very clear sign, and his 'reign' will not be a long one, we will still not know the *exact* day or hour. I say this because the coming of Christ is described a number of times in Scripture as being "like a thief", when you least expect it, as in our text in Matthew 24:

"If the homeowner had known in which watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. For this reason, you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect" (vv.43-44).

So it is corroborated in other texts in Scripture:

"The Day of the Lord will come **like a thief**. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and its works will be laid bare" (2 Peter 3:10).

"Behold, I am coming **like a thief**. Blessed is the one who remains awake and clothed, so that he will not go naked and let his shame be exposed" (Revelation 16:15).

However, unpreparedness is not a characteristic of the disciple of Christ, who is constantly ready to meet his or her Maker. As Paul put it:

"For you are fully aware that the Day of the Lord will come **like a thief** in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and security', destruction will come upon them suddenly, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. **But you, brothers, are not in the darkness so that this day should overtake you like a thief.** For you are all sons of the light and sons of the day; we do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not sleep as the others do, but let us remain awake and sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).

What he is saying here is that right at the time when the world is imagining that it has found “peace and security”, that will prove to be the opposite, as the coming of Christ will catch them all unawares. One can imagine a scenario here in which some tyrant (e.g., the Antichrist) claims to have “stopped all wars” and created “peace in our time” through his super-surveillance one-world state and extreme authoritarianism. The whole unbelieving world will be convinced of that. **But not the disciples of Christ because they know better. As the text above states, they are “not in the darkness so that this day should overtake them like a thief”. They do not sleep in a somnambulist state of deception like the rest of the world does. They remain awake and sober**, unlike the hypocrites who feign being “Christian”, as they will always fail to outwit the thief and be utterly unprepared, as we will see with the parable of the ten virgins in the next chapter. (NB: Even the death of the individual could be spoken of as coming like a thief, when you least expect it, and you find yourself face-to-face with your Maker).

Therefore, all disciples of Christ are called to “keep watch”. Being such a watchman is a serious business, by which we expose the works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11), warn others and draw closer to the Lord. Even if you do not believe that the coming of Christ is imminent, there are benefits to being watchful and prepared. First, it means that you will live your life with a love of purity and true saintliness (for you would not want to be found in any less a state than that). No saint could ‘go rogue’ when they know that they could meet Jesus at any moment! Second, it means that you will develop your discernment antenna. Someone who is on the lookout in the crow’s nest becomes familiar with enemy tactics and his *modus operandi* (M.O.). Third, it means that you will become useful to others because you have honed your level of discernment and spiritual insight.

How to Be a Faithful and Wise Servant of the Master (vv.45-51)

45. “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of his household, to give the others their food at the proper time? **46.** Blessed is that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. **47.** Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. **48.** But suppose that servant is wicked and says in his heart, ‘My master will be away a long time.’ **49.** And he begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. **50.** The master of that servant will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he

does not anticipate. **51.** Then he will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”

Here is another reminder of the need for preparedness for the Lord’s return and the need for watchfulness. There is a clear eschatological dimension to this parable because it speaks of when the master “returns” (alluding to the parousia of Christ) and of the wicked servant thinking that because his master will be “*away a long time*” he can live how he wants and neglect his responsibilities (vv.45,49).

One of those responsibilities is “*to give the others their food at the proper time*”. This is an intriguing phrase. I believe that it symbolically refers to providing spiritual nourishment to others, which is what a faithful servant of Jesus and perceptive watchman should be doing. And to be doing so will bring its rewards (v.46). There is no place among the Lord’s servants for selfish, egocentric people who just care about their own bellies and live how they want. Being a faithful servant requires much self-discipline, self-restraint, piercing wisdom and great charity.

This is a parable which refers symbolically to the return of Christ for His people. This parable, plainly designed to picture Jesus currently remaining in heaven before His return to judge the world, is a challenge for us to avoid becoming lax, unwatchful and self-centred. He said that the master (symbol of Jesus Himself) of the evil servant (symbol for those who reject His discipleship):

“will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not anticipate. Then he will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:50-51).

This is the same weeping and gnashing (grinding) of teeth which Christ has mentioned in relation to “outer darkness” (to which He referred three times in Matthew’s Gospel, 8:12; 22:13 and 25:30). It is yet another parallel idiom for what we popularly call “hell”, along with the use of sayings such as “eternal fire”, the “lake of fire”, “eternal destruction”, the “fiery furnace” and so on. To be assigned a place with the hypocrites means to be treated as a false disciple who was just playacting as a true one, therefore deserving of that “hell”. And so it is with yet another analogous saying for “hell” that Jesus says:

“Then he will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

I will have more to say about this “weeping and gnashing of teeth” when looking at v.30 in the next chapter. However, I must say that I have no idea how good Christian people can deny the existence of hell. Jesus said more about it than anyone else in the Bible, despite many claiming that Jesus never mentioned it! One may not like it. One may even find it anomalous or strange if one has not truly penetrated the truth behind it. But it is real, and no amount of whitewashing can deface it or erase it.

We will see three further references to the state of “hell” in chapter 25. There will be 1) The door shut in your face; 2) Consignment to outer darkness; 3) Eternal punishment. That is why we must prove our discipleship and worthiness of salvation by being both watchful and responsible in all our actions.

Now we turn to examine chapter 25.

Commentary on Chapter 25

The material in the previous chapter worked its way through from the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple to the second coming of Christ in judgement. Whereas the ascension of Christ and His return are the 'Christological bookends' of the 'shelf' of this age, the destruction of Jerusalem (with the temple) in AD 70 and the day of judgement at Jesus' return are the 'judgement bookends' of the 'shelf' of this age. The one 'bookend' heralded the end of the Old Testament era with a terrible judgement on unbelieving Israel and the other 'bookend' heralds the end of the Church age, the day of judgement, the dissolution of this cosmos and the creation of a new heaven and new earth.

The connection between these two 'judgement bookends' was encapsulated in the questions of the disciples and was the focus of Jesus' answers. These were followed by three parables – one at the end of chapter 24 and the other two in chapter 25, followed by a concluding graphic representation of the final judgement, at the end of the age in the last sixteen verses of chapter 25, which has some parabolic elements.

Bear in mind that there are no chapter divisions in the original texts. These were added centuries later as a help for readers. I think that it pays to see these two chapters as one and the same session of Jesus' teaching, with the parables applying important supplementary instruction about the Christian life in the context of Christ's return, beginning in 24:45. The parable at the end of the previous chapter referenced the delay of Christ's return to this earth expressed in typically symbolic parabolic language. What we call chapter 25 continues with the underlying theme still being the return of Christ in judgement, through two parables, but now focusing on preparedness for it (first parable), and how the genuine disciple of Christ is to live his or her life as a part of that preparedness using one's gifts, abilities and responsibilities (second parable). Then there is a third section which depicts how the disciple of Christ who lives selflessly, generously and charitably is a primary outward sign of his or her salvation; maybe even *the* sign of salvation, as we will discover in the exposition further below.

Please remember also how I mentioned in the Preface that a massive undergirding theme in these two chapters of Scripture demonstrates the revealing antithesis between the true and the false, the genuine and the counterfeit, the impostor versus ‘the real McCoy’, and the ability to differentiate between the two. So you have false Christs (24:4-5,15,23-26) versus the real Christ (24:27,30-31), false disciples (24:48-49; 25:2a,26-30;41) versus true ones (25:2b,21,23,34), false ‘parousias’ and the true one (24:26-27), and false prophets (v.11,24) contrasted with true prophecy (v.14).

It is vital to see these two chapters and this entire sermon not as some narrowly-defined advice for the disciples about how to prepare for what would befall Jerusalem nearly forty years later, but as providing a bird-s eye view of the entire age and how events at widely different times across this age are linked together prophetically and typologically. Coupled with that, we must take on board all the warnings, which are just as applicable now and across the age as they were when Jesus was speaking.

Now we turn to examine each of these three sections of chapter 25.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins – The Need to Have ‘Oil’ when it Counts (vv.1-13)

1. “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. **2.** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. **3.** The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take along any extra oil. **4.** But the wise ones took oil in flasks along with their lamps. **5.** When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. **6.** At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ **7.** Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. **8.** The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ **9.** ‘No,’ said the wise ones, ‘or there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ **10.** But while they were on their way to buy it, the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. **11.** Later the other virgins arrived and said, ‘Lord, lord, open the door for us!’ **12.** But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ **13.** Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

The external storyline of this parable is rather straightforward, though apparently, as I have discovered over the years, the interpretation is not, for there seem to be many different understandings about various aspects of it. Because of my determination to penetrate deeply the words of Jesus in His

parables (for they do run deep), I have spent some days meditating on the meaning. Although this is another parable about the need for preparedness for the return of Jesus, there is so much more to it than that – above all, a crucial difference between true disciples of Christ and false ones. So let's crack it open.

We are told that ten virgins took their lamps and went out to meet "the bridegroom". Jesus described Himself as the "bridegroom" earlier in His ministry (Matthew 9:15); and in another parable He is plainly referred to as the son of the king who is holding a wedding banquet for him (Matthew 22:1-14). The coming of Christ for His people at the end of the age is likened to a marriage supper with Jesus (the Lamb) being wedded to His bride the Church (Revelation 19:7). This parable is therefore plainly concerned with the return of Christ for His people at the end of the age.

We are told that five of the virgins were wise and five were foolish. I do not think that there is any major importance attached to there being exactly five and five. I just think that it is meant to indicate a clear division. The virgins plainly represent those who profess to be Christians. Up until the entrance of the bridegroom into the picture all the virgins appeared the same. However, when the bridegroom was "delayed" they all fell asleep (v.5). I do not think that there is necessarily anything wrong with that because both the wise and foolish ones fell asleep. If we were told that only the foolish ones had fallen asleep then we could obviously make some negative inferences. But the crucial element occurs in the fact that when the bridegroom appeared it was the foolish ones who were unprepared because they realised that they had no oil for their lamps (v.8). They then asked the wise ones to share some of their oil, who then understandably refused because there would not then have been enough to go round for the benefit of all (v.9).

So off they went to buy some extra oil but, lo and behold, the bridegroom arrived and the virgins "*who were ready*" (i.e., the wise ones) "*went into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut*" (v.10). Later on, the other virgins showed up at the door and said, "*Lord, lord, open the door for us!*" But the bridegroom replied, "*Truly I tell you, I do not know you*" (vv.11-12).

So what does all this mean? I believe that what is being shown to us here is that someone professing to be a Christian (but who is not

really one) can keep up the act when they are going about their lives. They can fellowship, go to church, join in the worship, use all the right religious clichés in prayers and conversation in front of others, take part in all the rituals, read the Bible, even study the Bible (with lots of bookmarks and notes in a big leather-bound one). But when the time comes for them to have to face their Maker, the truth will be revealed.

It is one thing to be enjoying the social warmth of church attendance, hanging out with others who claim to be “Christian”, getting involved in all the rituals and minutiae of church life, etc., which all involve what I call “the distraction of community”. **But when we come face-to-face with the Lord at His return (or even when we die) we are *totally on our own and have to answer individually to Him.*** So many professing “Christians” have never stood on their own but have to continually be busying themselves with that “distraction of community”, which is what encourages them to imagine that they are spiritually-minded and saintly.

When the time comes for the meeting with their Maker, they will imagine that they can refer to all the things they have done during the “distraction of community”. You can imagine their protests when they discover that “*the door was shut*” and Jesus says, “*I do not know you*”. For example, there will be hordes who say such things as, “*What? How can that be? I prepared the flowers every week in church and played the organ!*”; **or** “*You’re joking! I delivered loads of demons from people in church in your name!*”; **or** “*But I never missed a single church meeting or Bible study!*”; **or** “*Hey, come on! I was worship leader for ten years, and lifted up your holy name!*”; **or** “*Just a moment... I was a prophet of yours giving it out every week in words of knowledge in church!*”; **or** “*Hold on! I did many miracles, lengthened many legs, stopped countless headaches, removed masses of psychosomatic symptoms from people!*”; **or** “*I constantly spoke to you in my private prayer language; I thought we had a relationship!*”; **or** “*I got a Masters in Theology and was a pastor for years slaying thousands in the spirit with a mere touch of my hand! How could you do this?*”; **or** “*There must be some mistake. I preached through every book in the Bible faithfully and the whole church loved me!*” Truly, there is no worse delusion than self-delusion. One has to watch oneself for that with great perception.

We are in the same realm as the people mentioned in Hebrews 6 who were not genuinely regenerated disciples of Christ but they had enjoyed all the benefits of church life, yet then fell away from that. They are described as:

“those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age” (Hebrews 6:4-5).

Those verses plainly reveal the tremendous privilege of being part of the visible church and having received the word about Christ and responded to it, even if one is not genuinely a disciple of Christ. For, even if you are not a genuine regenerated disciple and have merely latched onto the church and other Christians, and think you are one, you have still *“been enlightened”* – that is, you have received the light of truth about Christ and responded to it in some way, though not all the way, and therefore that light has not properly been applied. You have still *“tasted the heavenly gift”* – had a taste of the church (which is *“the suburbs of heaven”*) and all it has to offer, and had a taste of closeness to God’s people, and seen what He can do. You have still *“shared in the Holy Spirit”* through all the benefits of being around those who have the Spirit, though you do not have the Holy Spirit indwelling you personally. You have *“tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age”* – though it was just a taste and none of that was properly applied to you. This is what happens when you place yourself in the company of the faithful if you are not yet truly transformed yourself but imagine that you are. **It is an enormous spiritual privilege even to be part of the visible church and to have the knowledge and fellowship which it potentially brings. But it is not enough to save you. You need your own oil for that – not someone else’s!**

In a way, those pseudo-Christians are like parasites leeching off the spirituality of genuine believers. When they realise they have no oil in their lamps, they will imagine that they can fall back on the oil of others who are truly saved. Thus, for them to be in the company of others who look as if they are saved is where they get their false assurance that they themselves have been saved. Others who are Christians is their ‘safe place’ (so they think). This is why they

generally would not choose very faithful small fellowships which major on a teaching ministry with Bible exposition, although a few might if they get a kick out of pietism to convince themselves they are saved. But most of them would rather be in 'bandwagon' megachurches which deal in dramatic 'pyrotechnics'.

This is rather like the situation in which someone is looking very happy and someone else says, *"I want whatever he's on!"* That's what it's like with these people who aren't really saved. The "distraction of community" provides them with the imaginary 'oil' of regeneration that they need in order to fantasize that their own lamp is lit. They want what you've got (if you've got it). That's the significance of when they say, *"Give us some of your oil"*. They want some of your oil alright, because they inwardly suspect, even know deep down, that they are bereft of it themselves. So, when 'push comes to shove', they want what you've got (if you've got it), and think that, like leeches, they can get it when they immerse themselves in the 'hothouse' community of a church and have some emotional experiences, mistaking them for spiritual ones.

This is the "diversion of pyrotechnics", which goes hand in hand with the "distraction of community" as a major way of imagining that one is saved. The "distraction of community" and the "diversion of pyrotechnics" are what inculcate in the hypocrite the illusion of the "oil" of regeneration. It seems like the real thing until you have to stand before your Maker — then you realise that you have no real oil of your own; it was just imaginary.

I can think of a personal anecdote which will give you an idea of what I mean about the desperate need for false "Christians" to leech off those who they think are real Christians. I remember a time when I was preaching way back in the early 1990s at an evangelical church in Scotland and was having a conversation with a woman after the service while we were all quietly sipping tea in the genteel environs of a well-furnished, restored 17th century hall attached to the church. She was a lawyer of some repute and plainly a big wheel in the congregation by the way that she carried herself. She took up a lot of space, if you get my drift. It all proceeded calmly until she suddenly asked me: *"You're not one of those fundamentalists are you?"* I replied politely: *"Well, if by that you mean do I believe that the Bible is the word of God and that Jesus Christ was the*

Son of God who came to take the penalty for our sins on the cross, then yes, I am". In an instant the calmness gave way to a violent tirade in which she began to yell at me, saying: "You people make me sick with your arrogance and narrow-mindedness. Who DO you think you are?" The word "do" was king-sized. The place fell silent, and you could have heard the smallest sugar-lump fall to the floor. At that point the minister intervened and tried to smooth it all over, as ministers are wont to do, and everything soon returned to normal with the quiet sipping of tea and scattered hushed conversations. However, later on in the car park as I was just about to get into my car, she came rushing up to me, grabbing my arm, and said, with a manic, desperate look on her face, "Where do you people get your faith!" I tried to respond, but it was a rhetorical question to which she didn't want an answer. In fact, I don't even think it was a question but a statement, which is why I have put an exclamation mark there instead of a question mark. It was just evidence of her desperation. There was a strange frisson of emptiness in the air and time seemed to stand still. I gave her my phone number and said she could call me anytime, but I never heard from her again. However, in her question was the key. She was one of the women who had no real oil for her lamp. She went to church each week; she sang the hymns; she prayed the prayers; she put her big fat cheque in the bag (to 'buy' the minister!); she carried her Bible; she called herself a believer. But when a genuine Christian had come to her church and preached a sermon which revealed her heart, despite the fact that she resented his teaching, **she wanted some of what he had but did not want to do what was necessary in order to receive it**. There was not even a trace of penitence in her heart. However, being a big wheel in her church gave her enough of the "distraction of community" to make her think she was one of the brethren.

The same situation as the one in our text, in which the door is firmly closed in the faces of impostors in the church who had no oil of their own, is described here:

"'Lord', someone asked Him, 'will only a few people be saved?' Jesus answered, 'Make every effort to enter through the narrow door. **For many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.** After the master of the house gets up and shuts the door, you will stand outside

knocking and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' But he will reply, 'I do not know where you are from.' Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' And he will answer, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers.'" (Luke 13:23-27).

Again, a similar scenario is described here:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

"I never knew you", or "I do not know you", or "I do not know where you are from" are not only among the most chilling words one could hear but they are rendered even more chilling by the fact that, prior to those things being said to them by Jesus, all those people imagined that they had the most cast-iron relationship with Him. So when Jesus then goes on to say in our text, *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour"* (v.13), **a major part of that eschatological 'keeping watch' is ensuring that one is actually saved and not just playing at it without even realising it – not just leeching off the apparent salvation and spirituality of others as a way of imagining that we ourselves are saved, keeping up the charade of having oil of our own.**

The oil is a kind of symbol of regeneration. In the case of the five foolish virgins, it was counterfeit regeneration. They were 'playing' at being a Christian, which of course they do so well. Fake oil, but real enough looking to fool those around them. So, when push came to shove and the Bridegroom had arrived, that fake oil no longer stood up or provided light. Their truth was out. **In reality, they had no oil of their own. They were frauds, impostors, charlatans – of which the visible church largely consists.**

"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24). That "many" who are mentioned there who "will try to enter and will not be able"

will have convinced themselves that they are among the company of the saved (otherwise they would never have tried to enter), mainly because they surrounded themselves either with those who really *were* saved or with those who seem to have a lot of quasi-spiritual stuff going on (e.g., false healings, false prophecies, pseudo-wonders, falling down, lots of ostentatious prayers, mumbling gibberish, continually talking about “revival” and other forms of ‘hopium’, big megachurch Las Vegas style razzle-dazzle, etc.). **The “distraction of community” and the “diversion of pyrotechnics” as aiding false manifestations of oil are the enemies of faith and the heinous counterfeiters of it.**

The Parable of the Talents — Using Our God-Given Gifts, Abilities and Responsibilities to the Maximum (vv.14-30)

14. “For it is just like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted them with his possessions. **15.** To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent—each according to his own ability. And he went on his journey. **16.** The servant who had received the five talents went at once and put them to work and gained five more. **17.** Likewise, the one with the two talents gained two more. **18.** But the servant who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master’s money. **19.** After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. **20.** The servant who had received the five talents came and presented five more. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ **21.** His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master!’ **22.** The servant who had received the two talents also came and said, ‘Master, you entrusted me with two talents. See, I have gained two more.’ **23.** His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master!’ **24.** Finally, the servant who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. **25.** So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what belongs to you.’ **26.** ‘You wicked, lazy servant!’ replied his master. ‘You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed. **27.** Then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received it back with interest. **28.** Therefore take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents. **29.** For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. **30.** And throw that worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”

As shown earlier, we have in these two chapters 24 and 25, prophecies about false Christs, false prophets and false Christians as an essential undergirding theme which applies to the entire age, yet increasing in intensity as the end of this age draws near. Here we have yet another parable about the difference between genuine and false Christians. For Jesus has been at great pains to point out the differences between true and false representations of Christs, prophets, and disciples throughout this entire sermon on the Mount of Olives. In fact, these two chapters are a masterclass in lauding truth over falsehood, and in the parables in these chapters, He is citing the differences between true and false Christians as the climactic peroration of His sermon, the inferences of which must not be lost on its readers.

In order to begin expounding this portion of the text, I first need to explain that a ‘Talent’ (Greek: *τάλαντα*, *talanta*) in this parable refers to a unit of weight used in the ancient world. A Talent in Bible times was the largest ancient unit of weight and money, often equalling 75-100 pounds (35-45 kg) of precious metal.²³ In this parable, a ‘talent’ represents a massive sum – roughly a couple of decades’ wages for a basic worker. In the first century it amounted to a figure so large that most at the time would have had no personal experience of it.

Anyway, in this parable, the storyline is that a master goes on a journey and, before doing so, he entrusted from his possessions Talents in various proportions – five Talents to one servant, two Talents to another servant, and to another servant just one Talent, each according to his own ability. Obviously, they were expected to “do business” with that until the master returned (cf. Luke 19:13). When he did return from his journey away, the master asked the servants how they got on. The one who had been given five Talents had shrewdly made five more (a total of ten). The one who had been given two Talents had made two more (a total of four). But the one who had been given just one Talent had merely buried that one Talent in the ground and had done nothing with it, on the basis of various unfounded grudges he held against his master. The

²³ Our English word, “talent”, is derived from this Greek word, via the Latin “*talentum*”. In Medieval Latin the sense was extended to mean ‘ability’ through the influence of this very parable.

master, on seeing how his Talents had done, rewarded both the servant who made five more and the servant who made two more in an identical manner, making them *“in charge of many things”* (vv.21,23) and saying they could *“enter into the joy of your master!”* However, the servant who did nothing with his Talent other than bury it in the ground was severely chastised by his master who said that the servant should have invested it. Then that one Talent was taken from that unprofitable servant and given to the servant who now had ten Talents. There then follows a chilling postscript which says this:

“For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. And throw that worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (vv.29-30).

The inferences and lessons from this parable are all too apparent, if one is willing to learn them. The master represents the Lord Jesus Christ. The journey that the master had taken represents Jesus having ascended to heaven, where He was ‘taken in’ *“until the time comes for the restoration of all things”* (Acts 3:21); that is, until His return in glory for judgement at the end of the age. The servants represent those who claim to be disciples of Christ, who are given spiritual gifts, abilities and responsibilities according to their capacity, and expected to use them judiciously and without hindrance during their lives. If they do so, they will be rewarded in the new creation. However, if they have grudgingly failed to use that which they were given by God in their lives, then they will reap the terrible retribution for that, which – without mincing my words – is hell, *“outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”*. For in failing to put to use what they had been given, they were demonstrating their lack of regeneration. **Genuinely regenerated people always turn their spirituality into fruitful actions.**

This is yet another parable demonstrating the difference between true and false disciples of Christ, which is encapsulated in the words, *“everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him”*. This means that the fruitful people, who actually

make use of their gifts, abilities and responsibilities, will be rewarded abundantly; whereas those who are found to have done nothing with them (for this simply proves that they were not really regenerated) will lose absolutely everything.

This saying occurs five times in the Gospels, and in Luke's version there is even more light shed on it, as he says: *"Whoever does not have, even what they think they have, will be taken from them"* (Luke 8:18). The professing "Christians" – false disciples – who imagined that they were saved will have even that delusion taken away from them and they will wind up in hell with nothing but misery. *"Faith without deeds is dead"* (James 2:20,26). **Dead faith means no faith at all.** A professing "Christian" who fails to make use of his or her gifts, abilities and responsibilities manifests such dead faith. The eternal consequences for playing at being a "Christian" will be even worse than for being a typical atheist (2 Peter 2:21; Hebrews 10:26-27). Even Google AI knows this. If you ask it "What are the consequences for being a fake Christian", the answer it gives is:

- 1) Spiritual Condemnation:** Fake Christianity is viewed as spiritual deception, often leading to a greater risk of hell, as it assumes salvation without repentance.
- 2) Judgment on Hypocrisy:** Those who 'play' at being Christians are seen as bringing the way of truth into disrepute, often causing others to reject faith altogether.
- 3) False Sense of Security:** A 'fake' Christian often thinks they are safe, which prevents them from seeking true repentance, unlike an atheist who may be more easily reached because they don't claim to already be saved".

That is actually a very perceptive summary from a robot which seems to know more than many professing Christians today! So please do not imagine that playing at being a "Christian" is somehow better than not being a Christian at all. Quite the reverse is true. Even what the fake "Christian" imagines that he has (including the false security which comes from planting himself in the visible church) will be taken away from him.

When one truly loves Jesus, one keeps His commandments and follows His leadings (John 14:15), and that fidelity is demonstrated

in a life of work for Him, one way or another. The genuine Christian is continually conscious of being a representative of faith and of his or her Master, Jesus, in every action and avenue. But the phoney “disciples” who are just playing at being Jesus’ servants will be ‘dis-covered’ at Jesus’ return and they will pay a terrible price. “Weeping and gnashing of teeth” is no laughing matter. The implication in our text is of being eternally lost in “outer darkness”, desolation where there is a consciousness of that alienation which causes “weeping and gnashing of teeth”. This “gnashing of teeth” carries an image of extreme defiance and rage – an expression of contempt for the Divine, exactly the same contempt (though now magnified) which has been bubbling beneath the surface throughout the lives of those who utterly despise the idea of a higher being to whom they are truly answerable.

That “gnashing of teeth” is the wordless articulation of this expression of rage: “No one has the right to rule over me!” Ah, but they do. Your Creator *does* have that right; and **this whole theatre of life on earth down through the ages has been a demonstration of that right of God to rule and of the rejection of that rule by most.** What about the weeping, or wailing as it is sometimes translated? The Greek word translated as “wailing” or “weeping” is κλαυθμός, *klauthmós*, which refers to visibly grieving or lamenting. What it actually means is this:

“A bitter grief that springs from feeling utterly hopeless. This ‘wailing’ is usually accompanied by shrieks, brought on by uncontainable emotional (psychological) pain”.²⁴

Remember that this is the afterlife state of those who professed to be “Christian” and received ‘Talents’ from Christ but who grudgingly never used them, despite carrying on playing at being one of His disciples. It is as if the Talents were given to them so as to render them even more culpable, which could very well be the case (cf. Isaiah 6:10). The chilling condemnation of such people in this parable is formidable and should give us considerable pause for thought. I hope that you agree.

²⁴ From “Helps Word Studies” on the word κλαυθμός, *klauthmós*, translated here as “wailing”.

**The Parable of the Separation of the Sheep and Goats —
Faith Without Deeds is Worthless (vv.31-46)**

31. “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. **32.** All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33.** He will place the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. **34.** Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. **35.** For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in, **36.** I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you visited Me.’ **37.** Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? **38.** When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? **39.** When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?’ **40.** And the King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.’ **41.** Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. **42.** For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink, **43.** I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, I was naked and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after Me.’ **44.** And they too will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ **45.** Then the King will answer, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.’ **46.** And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

With those stunning final words, Jesus’ three-and-a-half-year teaching ministry comes to an end. But those are not the only stunning words in these verses. “*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne*” (v.31). We see here that the “Son of Man” (v.31) is also “the King” (v.34), which is hardly surprising in view of the fact that the Son of Man sits on “*His glorious throne*” (v.31). Of course, we do not need to think of that throne as having any material capacity, for by then the present physical cosmos will have gone (Revelation 20:11). The throne is plainly a symbol of Jesus power, glory and authority. I can hardly wait to see how all this ‘throneness’ will be manifested! It is one of a number of parabolic elements in this account of the judgement, along with the sheep and the goats — symbols of the saved, who will go into “*eternal life*”, and the unsaved, who will go to “*eternal punishment*”, v.46.

So the people of all nations throughout the whole of time are gathered before God for judgement. This includes everyone who has ever lived – a vast quantity of people numbering in the billions. Of course, how God will deal with this from a logistical point of view we cannot picture exactly as it is beyond our puny imaginations. We can just leave all that to Him, thankfully!

However, there is going to be a separation (vv.32-33) between those Jesus refers to as “*sheep*” and others as “*goats*”. The sheep are the ones who will “*inherit the kingdom*” prepared for them “*from the foundation of the world*” (v.34). This is the kingdom of God in its final realisation in the new heaven and new earth. Whenever that phrase, “*from the foundation of the world*”, is being used to describe the preparation of the kingdom for Jesus’ disciples, it is a reference to election and predestination. The criteria for inheriting the kingdom “*prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” inarguably makes that inheritance one which involves Divine election, as displayed in that key phrase “*from the foundation of the world*” (see also by way of comparison Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:29; 2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 13:8).

Then Jesus mentions some criteria which are germane to being among the inheritance-receiving sheep who will be part of the population of the new creation:

“For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you visited Me” (vv.35-36).

Naturally, the sheep express some surprise at this and ask when did they do all that for Him (vv.37-39). Then the King (Jesus) replies, “*Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me*” (v.40). So, someone doing all those lovely things for Jesus’ “*brothers*” is the equivalent of doing it for Jesus Himself, so closely does He identify with those “*brothers*”. Jesus then says to the “*goats*”:

“Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and

you did not take Me in, I was naked and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after Me" (vv.41-43).

Again, naturally, these folks are confused and then ask when they failed to minister to Him in all those ways (v.44). Then the King replies,

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (vv.45-46).

So not ministering in these ways to "the least of these brothers" of Jesus disqualifies them from heaven and qualifies them for nothing less than hell. **The question is then begged: "Who are Jesus' brothers exactly?"** This has been the subject of fevered analysis since the Scriptures were written and read. As I disclosed earlier, one of the "golden rules" of hermeneutics is that hard-to-understand passages of Scripture "*should always be interpreted in the light of other Scriptures which plainly have a bearing on, and relevance to, those hard-to-understand passages*". So, with that in mind, let us examine this very carefully.

There are many who say that Jesus' "brothers", as mentioned in this parable, refers to every single human being who ever lived. **But if "the least of these brothers of mine" refers to everyone in the human race from all time and that everyone will be judged solely on their works of charity to all, then what advantage is there in being a disciple of Christ over a do-gooding secular atheist?** If this was the case, then what was the purpose of the atonement of Christ? It becomes meaningless.

In other words, is Jesus really here endorsing the "Social Gospel" – be a good pagan and you're in the kingdom of God? Surely not. The kingdom was not prepared before creation for everyone in the world who engages in acts of charity, or that would contradict so many verses in the New Testament and make qualification for heaven a matter of what used to be known as "works-righteousness". Surely, this is logic. In fact, to claim that Jesus' "brothers" here refers to everyone in the world regardless of their spiritual persuasion fits in with the theosophical New Age universalist "Christ consciousness" notion, that Christ dwells in

everyone (thereby making them His brothers) and it just needs discovering. That is the clear implication. No need to heed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Just get cracking on your charitable good works and you'll be alright. Does that sound correct? I think not!

So who are the brothers of Jesus to whom He is referring here? Let's examine the text again. In verse 40, Jesus gives an explanation for His list of things that He said the sheep had done for Him: *"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me"*. For some strange reason, this phrase "these brothers of mine" has been a subject of controversy. So many want to apply it to the whole human race, whereas a much smaller number claim it refers to God's people, Jesus' disciples. I am definitely among those who believe the latter, for the following reasons. Firstly, earlier in Matthew's gospel, the identity of Jesus' brothers has already been revealed:

*"While Jesus was still speaking to the crowds, His mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to Him. Someone told Him, 'Look, Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to You'. But Jesus replied, 'Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?' Pointing to His disciples, He said, "**Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother** and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:46-50).*

I think that Jesus made it clear there who exactly His brothers are (and sisters too, of course – indeed His whole real family). In Luke's version of this, Jesus says: *"My mother and brothers are **those who hear the word of God and carry it out**"* (Luke 8:21). This is most applicable to our text, because it lays stress on the fact that we do not merely hear the word of God and do nothing. **We are doers – those who carry it out!** *"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only. Otherwise, you are deceiving yourselves"* (James 1:22). Loving the brethren – Christ's brethren – is one of the great signs of salvation which, if we do not have it, we are obviously not saved and are to be counted among the goats: *"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers. The one who does not love remains in death"* (1 John 3:14). The clear implication there is that if one does not love the brothers (regenerated followers of Christ), then one is

spiritually dead and only worthy of eternal punishment, as in fact is shown in our text (Matthew 25:45-46).

There is another text referring to the identity of Jesus' brothers:

“In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting for God, for whom and through whom all things exist, to make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. For both the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are of the same family. So **Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers**” (Hebrews 2:10-11).

We see there that Jesus' "brothers" are those He brings to glory, for whom He is "the author of their salvation" – more proof that Jesus was referring to disciples of His in our text in Matthew 25, when He said, "these brothers of Mine", rather than everyone in the world, which is the typical cop-out, universalist, Pelagian position.

There is more. Immediately after He was resurrected, "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" met Him and He said to them: "Do not be afraid...Go and **tell My brothers to go to Galilee**. There they will see Me" (Matthew 28:10). The term "My brothers" there plainly refers to His disciples. Is it likely that Jesus would refer to "these brothers of Mine" on the Mount of Olives on Tuesday in His "passion week" to mean everyone in the world, when just five days later on the Sunday He uses the same term to refer to His disciples? Let's continue with this: Again, disciples of Christ are referred to as Jesus' brothers here: "For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that **He would be the firstborn among many brothers**" (Romans 8:29).

Not everyone in the world is in God's family. There is a necessary criterion for being in it. It's called "adoption". Before coming to Christ, everyone in this world is a spiritual 'orphan' under the wrath of God and under which he or she will remain even after death (John 3:36), if they do not repent, no matter how many good deeds they may do, for it is only by the grace of God in an extraordinary act of salvation that one can be saved: "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, **not by works**, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). If the word of God says that salvation comes "not by works" but only as a gift from God, then how could it be possible for everyone and anyone in the world to enter eternal life solely on the

basis of giving hungry and thirsty people something to eat or drink, taking in strangers, clothing the clothesless, looking after the sick, and visiting prisoners?

Has the point been made yet? It would seem that it needs to be, because so many professing Christians – even many well-known academic commentators – are claiming that this text is teaching just that. But, as already noted above, the whole of the global population, unless they come to Christ and become His disciples, are spiritual orphans in the bleak orphanage of this fallen world. The only way out of that orphanage is to be adopted into the family of God:

“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery that returns you to fear, but you received **the Spirit of adoption to sonship**, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. And if we are children, then we are heirs: heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with Him, so that we may also be glorified with Him”(Romans 8:15-17).

So we are adopted as God’s children only if we believe and come through Christ, with whom we become “co-heirs”, His brothers, with God as our Father. Unless one is “*born from above*” (that is, “*birthed by God*”), one cannot even *see* the kingdom of God (as it says in John 3:3)! As John put it elsewhere:

“All who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of blood, nor of the desire or will of man, **but born of God**” (John 1:12-13).

Now we can begin to understand what these sixteen verses in Matthew 25:31-46 are really all about. When Jesus said to the sheep in the parable, “*Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me*” (v.40), He is revealing His identification with His people. If you do it for the brothers – ‘these brothers of His’ – you do it for Him. There is a parallel passage of Scripture which describes this phenomenon to a “T”, when He said to His Apostles:

“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives the One who sent Me. Whoever

receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple, truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward" (Matthew 10:40-42).

Notice that Jesus referred to His disciples as "*these little ones*". He used the same description in a number of other places during His ministry (e.g., Matthew 18:6,10,14), when comparing His disciples to children. Does this not fit with Jesus saying in our text, "*the least of these brothers of mine*" (verse 40)?

Although we, as Jesus' spiritual "brothers", are indeed encouraged to do good to and for all, our emphasis should always be towards those who are our fellow disciples of Christ. That is the mark that distinguishes His disciples from the rest of the world. "*So then, as we have opportunity, we should do good to everyone, and especially toward those of the household of the faith*" (Galatians 6:10). **Showing love towards the "brothers" and loving to be around them and wanting the very best for them is actually a sign of salvation,** as I showed above (1 John 3:14). This is one of the bounties of being part of a genuine Christian fellowship. As James says:

"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you tells him, "Go in peace; stay warm and well fed," but does not provide for his physical needs, what good is that? So too, **faith by itself, if it does not result in action, is dead**".

Thus, faith without action in deeds is dead and no faith at all. Conversely, seemingly good deeds without faith behind them – even if they appear exemplary and self-sacrificial – cannot earn someone salvation. **In this parable of the sheep and goats, the clear message is that being selfless and doing good for the brethren of Christ are the big signs of salvation for the faithful.** For it is on the basis that the sheep have done all that goodness towards the brethren that they are received into heaven, precisely because **it proves the validity of their faith.** They are not saved solely because they did those deeds, but doing those deeds is the

visible sign that they are saved. As J.C. Ryle put it, *"We are not justified by our works, but the justified person works"*. This passage about the sheep and the goats is disclosing the Litmus Test of faith and of being regenerated. **Regeneration is the engine of good deeds towards the brothers and sisters in Christ.**

In Jesus' parabolic vocabulary, the sheep represent His people. He is the gate for the sheep, through which they are saved. He is listened to by the sheep who hear His voice. He is their good shepherd who lays down His life for them – all of which is plainly depicted in John 10:1-16.

So this story/parable of the sheep and goats is not a commendation of what is known as "works-righteousness" – as if our deeds save us rather than our justification by faith – but it is revealing that *"faith without deeds is worthless"* and *"dead"* (James 2:20,26 taken with Romans 5:1 and Ephesians 2:8-9) and that **the validity of genuinely being one of the sheep is proven by the love that one shows in one's actions for Jesus's brothers and sisters, the company of the saved.** As Jesus put it elsewhere:

*"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. **By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another"** (John 13:34-35).*

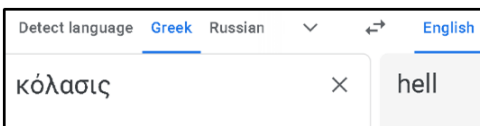
This is echoed by John in his first letter:

*"If anyone with earthly possessions sees his brother in need, but withholds his compassion from him, how can the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us love not in word and speech, but in action and truth. **And by this we will know that we belong to the truth,** and will assure our hearts in His presence" (1 John 3:17-19).*

Those who do not show themselves to be genuine disciples of Christ through their deeds – whether they are openly unregenerate or counterfeit "Christians" – will be revealed in full on that great and terrible day of the Lord when Jesus uncovers the hearts of all. For unregenerate people are generally hostile to the full-time faithful brothers of Jesus, genuine disciples of Christ who openly declare their love of God and gratitude to Jesus (Matthew 24:9; John 15:18-21; 1 John 3:13; 2 Timothy 3:12) and proclaim a Gospel to match it.

So the King says to the goats: *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these [brothers of mine], you did **not** do for Me”* (v.45). Doing good things out of love for the brothers of Jesus – His people, His body – is plainly a sign of salvation (cf. 1 John 3:14). *“If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple, truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward”* (Matthew 10:42). Then Jesus adds as the summary concluding statement to this depiction parable: *“And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (v.46).

There are many who quibble over the meaning of that word “eternal” in relation to punishment. They say that the Greek word translated as “eternal”, αἰώνιος, *aiónios*, really only means ‘for the length of an age’ because it is derived from αἰών, *aión*, meaning age. Therefore they say it cannot mean everlasting and is just temporary, until they have learned their lesson. But that brings a huge difficulty with it, because of the verse at the end of our text which states: *“And they [the goats] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (Matthew 25:46). For if the punishment is not eternal, then neither can be the “eternal life” for the righteous, as the same Greek word pertains to each. If “eternal life” is not eternal for God’s people, then what happens after it? Do we go back to having an unregenerate nature? That whole whitewash is ridiculous. Obviously, from our limited, three-dimensional perspective, we cannot properly perceive what ‘eternal’ precisely means. But if the same adjective pertains to both sides of the final judgement scenario, then that shows us with what we are dealing: Everlastingness.



The word translated as ‘punishment’ in v.46 is κόλασις, *kólasis*, which can also be translated as

“torment”, as in the text: *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment”* (1 John 4:18). It is surely no coincidence that the translation of *kólasis* in modern Greek is, in fact, “hell” (see image, above, from Google Translate)! It is also used in Greece today in a colloquial, expletive manner, e.g., **“ω, κόλαση! Πού θα τελειώσει όλο αυτό?”**, **O, kólasi! Pou tha teleiósei ólo aftó** (“**Oh, hell – where will this all end?**”). It is so obvious that we are dealing with something devastating and everlasting.

You may say that the whole of eternity doesn't leave room for learning the lesson. **But the lesson was supposed to be learned now, in this dimension. That is what this life is for! This life of ours is a brief lesson-life!** If the only thing which makes you want to "learn the lesson" (i.e., a reluctant "*Okay, God, I give in*") is discovering first-hand after death how bad the 'second death' is (when you've been warned about it over and over again and just scoffed), then that is the wrong motivation altogether! **The time for choice is now, and is not based on fear or compulsion but on realising the power and glory of God with all the love and holy fear in one's soul.** Once death strikes, the die (pun intended) has been cast and the choice has been made. I am mindful of that fateful saying in Ecclesiastes, "*In the place where the tree falls, there it will lie*" (Ecclesiastes 11:3).

These are 'dead souls' that we are talking about; people who spent their lives either wilfully ignoring or despising God openly, or merely playing at being a "Christian" like a hypocrite. These are the type of people to whom Paul was referring when he described them as "*vessels of His wrath, prepared for destruction*" (Romans 9:22). Oh, we are entering the deep things of God here; and few dare to go there as it offends their sensibilities, thinking they are more humane than the Creator of the universe because 'that's not how they would do it' if they were in charge. (Imagine that!). For a voice says to those who question God's sovereign actions in this respect:

"But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, 'Why did You make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for special occasions and another for common use?" (Romans 9:20-21).

It doesn't stop there, for Paul continues:

"What if God, intending to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the vessels of His wrath, prepared for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the vessels of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory – including us, whom He has called not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles?" (Romans 9:22-24)

Are you discerning the implications of what Paul is saying in the above quotation concerning why these dead souls, “*sons of disobedience*”, “*vessels of wrath*”, were created in the first place? This is serious stuff. To try and mitigate these uncomfortable truths is the wrong approach. Instead, we should find a way of penetrating their mysteries and then accepting them – not as a point of resignation but with wonder at the infinite wisdom of God and our own comparative stupidity. **Suffice it to say that “eternal punishment” is something utterly dreadful and unthinkable and, humanly speaking, it potentially hangs over the head of everyone born into this world.**

So ends the sermon on the Mount of Olives by the Lord Jesus Christ. Seventy-two hours after His sermon had concluded (probably late afternoon/early evening on the Tuesday), Jesus’ body was likely being taken down from the cross on the Friday.

The content of these extraordinary two chapters was Jesus’ perorational ‘swansong’ to the world and especially to the Church – informing it of things which were yet to come: The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 as the postscript to the definitive end of the age of Israel; the warnings about false Christs and false prophets; wars and rumours of wars; nations and kingdoms rising against each other; famines, earthquakes, pandemics, all of which have been like the beginning of the labour-pains of a gestating mother as the contractions increase in pain and intensity throughout this age, from the ascension of Christ to His second coming and the birth of the new aeon, the New Jerusalem. Then there was mention of the persecutions, the hatred of disciples, the apostasy, betrayal, the multiplication of wickedness, the growing cold of love, the necessity to proclaim the Gospel to all nations, after which that has been accomplished the end will come. There is prime mention of the “abomination of desolation” – the desecration of the temple of God – by which three instances of it are ‘stacked’ on each other with various periods in between: Antiochus Epiphanes in 156 BC, General Titus in AD 70, and the Antichrist in AD ????. Corresponding to that manifestation of the “abomination of desolation” in the Antichrist, there will be the time of great tribulation in which the saints will be terribly persecuted

and killed, which had its original type in the terrible times in AD 70, though the time of tribulation in the future will far eclipse even that. Finally, there is the return of Christ like lightning flashing from one end of the world to the other to bring in the judgement and the vindication of all that the saints have been proclaiming from the time of Christ's ascension to the final proclamation of the Church's testimony.

The parables after that, at the end of chapter 24 and in chapter 25 were not just tacked on to the end of the prophetic sermon. They play a vital part in illustrating the need for preparedness on the part of all people throughout the age and the honing of one's own soul in sanctification and cleansing, being confident in having done all that we can with what we have been given, and having loved the brethren (and sistren!), so as to be ready to meet the Lord at any time. **We are not to be put off being prepared because we imagine that it could be many years, decades or even centuries before Christ's return. Neither are we to overthink it.** Jesus Himself forbade any speculations about precisely how events will pan out when He said to the disciples, *"It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority"* (Acts 1:7). It is not for us to know either. We should heed that mighty fact.

Dear Father in heaven, enlighten us with your Spirit as we penetrate the deep wisdom of your Son contained in these two towering chapters of Scripture. Please give us the patience and perseverance we need to contend with this chaotic world. Please also enable us to endure to the end of our lives or to the end of this age, whichever should come first, and to be faithful bearers of your truth before an increasingly rebellious world. We ask all this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

SIGNS, TRIBULATION, AND THE NEED FOR PREPAREDNESS

Writing this commentary is a project I have wanted to tackle for some years. In a way, this project is in similar territory to the Book of Revelation, on which I have already written a commentary. It is similar in the sense that it is prophecy on a number of levels that has been interpreted in different ways, often outlandishly. That has been because people have an agenda and have to make everything fit into that agenda, come what may.

I can honestly say that my agenda (if I have one) has only one item on it: To get to the truth and heart of the matter and try to get to what is the most likely explanation of each phrase and verse. With some verses, that is quite simple to do; with others, great patience is needed.

In Jesus' presentation in Matthew 24, there are some verses which seem at first to present major difficulties for faithful interpretation (e.g., verses 15, 34 and 36). This has led to there being many different interpretations of those verses, which must be confusing to anyone studying this chapter. Thus, I have wrestled with those verses until I have found an interpretation that I can live with and enthusiastically get behind.

Therefore, what I present in these pages is the fruit of some forty years of deep thought, meditation and study. Whether you agree with my interpretations or not, I hope that you will at least take away a keenness to delve even further into these extraordinary chapters of Jesus' teaching.



Alan Morrison is a writer, poet, songwriter, Bible teacher and spiritual counsellor. His discipleship of Christ for some decades has brought him both poignant challenges and immense rewards. After some years of experience in social work, counselling and freelance journalism, he spent four years in theological college (1987-1991), after which he served several years as a pastor, which gave him a steep learning curve in both his knowledge of the sacred texts and the fascinating vagaries of human nature. In 1989, Alan founded and edited *Diakrisis* – a journal of pastoral theology – which still continues today as the Diakrisis Project online. He takes an active interest in Christian Apologetics. Alan currently lives in Somerset in the UK and spends his time writing, cycling, birdwatching, photographing, and wandering around the countryside.