

## A Look At Matthew 24; Part 2

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(Please read Part 1 in FR 225 before reading this.)

**30** Here is another misunderstood verse. The NIV reads: *“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”* The NASB reads basically the same with the exception of “nations” being rendered “tribes.” These two “translations” are very misleading. It was not the sign that was to be seen in the sky, but rather the sign, the destruction of Jerusalem, would signify the Son of Man in heaven with power and glory. Heaven and sky are both used to render the Greek word “**ouranos**.” The Son of Man was in heaven, not the sign, while neither was in the sky. Some may argue, that Christ was supposed to be on earth at the “parousia,” not in heaven. However, heaven is not a remote place but the spiritual realm that is unseen around us. Jesus prayed for the kingdom of God to come and for God’s will to be done on earth as in heaven. So, if Christ was in power and glory in heaven, then wouldn’t he also be on earth?

In this passage, we must note two more Greek words, “**phule**” and “**ethnos**.” The word used in this instance is “**phule**” and always means tribe. It is specifically and exclusively used in the NT when referring to the tribes of Israel. The NIV uses the word nations. This is incorrect. As mentioned earlier, the Greek word for nations (gentiles) is “**ethnos**” and is not found in this verse. Let’s move on to the word “**kopsontai**” which literally means “to beat one’s breast.” The word does not mean mourn. However, beating the breast was a common way of mourning for the Jews, just like sitting in sackcloth and ashes. This was not used by the gentiles then, and is not used by us today. So, to whom does this prophecy pertain? To the Jews in the first century. A fifth word needs to be discussed, “**ge**.” It can mean earth, but more often refers to land, and context is the determining factor. Now because the tribes of Israel are the subject, land is the proper translation here. The final word to examine in this verse is “**horao**.” It means perceive, recognize, know, take note. Literally, this verse would read: *“And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then will beat their breasts all the tribes of the land, and they will perceive the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and much glory.”*

**31** The gathering of the elect. The trumpet of course is figurative. The same thing is referred to in 1 Cor. 15:52 when all would be changed and the dead would be raised. Also 1 Thess. 4:13-17 refers to this same event.

**32-33** The parable of the fig tree shows that they were to watch for the indicators so they would know when these things were coming. Such a statement would be ridiculous if projecting into the distant future, because they would all be long dead and gone by the time the indicators were apparent. Second Peter 3:4 shows that after some 30 years, many had indeed quit paying attention, and were calling Jesus a farce. Is it amazing that today so many do not believe after 2000 years without supposed fulfillment?

Some contend that the fig tree represents Israel and that it sprouted its leaves in 1948. It is easy to see that the fig tree represents nothing more than a fig tree when we read Luke 21:29, "***Behold the fig tree and all trees.***"

**34** "***This generation***" means the generation to whom Jesus was speaking. The Greek word "**haute**" means "this," not "that." The word "**genea**" always means "generation." Some claim it can mean "race" (at least for this one single passage), but an overview of each instance in the NT will reveal such to be absolutely false. The word for race is "**genos.**" Yes, the words are related and are from the same root, but looking up each use of the two words in their contexts, shows that they are two different words with a very discrete difference in meaning. The two cannot be interchanged or even blended, and the writers of the NT do not interchange them in any sense. It was just the same meaning as Luke 17:25 where Jesus said of himself, "***But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.***" He meant the generation that would crucify him.

The January 2003 issue has a complete list of both words as found in the NT. Check them out at your leisure and see for yourself that "**genea**" means generation, and "**genos**" is rendered as race, kind, descent, nationality, offspring, children, native, by birth, countrymen, etc.

**35** Heaven and earth will pass away but not the words of Jesus. Some OT references to heaven and earth used in a symbolic manner are as follows: Duet. 4:26, 30:19, 31:28, 32:1, Isaiah 1:2, 51:16.

**36** The futurist's favorite defense. "The time is completely unknown" is the common refrain. Yet, the same folks tell us that the time is near. How do they know? "Look around and see all the words of Jesus being fulfilled." Which is it—known or unknown? The verse says what it says, "the day and the hour" are not known. The general time was just revealed—"this generation." The parable of the fig tree backs this up. Now look on down a few verses to verse 50. "***The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect and at an hour which he does not know.***" This little parable speaks nothing about lifetimes and epochs. It relates in no way to a distant future by any stretch of the imagination. However, it does directly relate to the "parousia" of the Lord in that generation.

**37-39** The "parousia" of the Son of Man, will be as the days of Noah. In other words it will come with a vengeance upon those who do not believe and did not prepare. It is a comparison, not an exact likeness. When we look at Luke's account (17:26-33), he adds the demise of Sodom. The flood and Sodom were not identical. There were certain similarities and these were to be common to the "parousia" of the Son of Man. It all boils down to the righteous being saved and the wicked being destroyed.

**40-41** This has been traditionally associated with the "rapture." The ones being taken are "raptured out" while the nonbelievers are left to the "great tribulation," all coming soon in our future. Most preterists see the ones taken as the nonbelieving Jews, being slain and taken into captivity by the Romans. In other words, one taken in judgment and the others left in safety. This is reinforced by Luke's account (which is not in the same order as Matthew's). Luke 17:37 has the disciples asking the question "***Where Lord?***" Jesus answers, "***Where the body is, there also the eagles will be gathered.***" The

preterists say the “where” cannot be pertaining to heaven, but must refer to Jerusalem, where the Jews were destroyed. They claim the eagles are in reference to the Roman soldiers who had eagles on their ensigns. The eagle was in fact the symbol for Rome. While this scenario seems to be believable, it is perhaps only a convenience of interpretation. Another point used to back this up is the parable of the wheat and the tares, which shows the tares being removed from the wheat. But are the tares of the parable really the Jews who remained in Jerusalem? Let’s compare the parable of the wedding feast in Matt. 22. Are not the ones who were invited but refused to attend the Jews who would not follow Christ? If so, are not they the ones who remained in Jerusalem? Further in the parable, a man is shown to attend the feast but was not found in wedding garments and hence thrown into outer darkness? Does this not represent the hypocrites who infiltrated the kingdom? In other words, those who claimed to follow Christ yet inwardly did not. Would not the tares then represent those same hypocrites, being allowed to grow among the wheat until the harvest, or end of the age? Were those Christ hating Jews ever in the kingdom? I do not think so.

Looking at both Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts, there are two Greek words that require definition in order to understand these passages correctly. These are the words translated “taken” and “left.” This will then show that the ones “taken” are not the Jews and the ones “left” are not the Christians, but the other way around, as the rapturists see it. I believe that by examining these two words, the true meaning will become clear.

The word used for taken is “**paralambano**” and means, take to oneself, take along, accept, or receive. It is clear that this does not pertain to the Jews, but rather to the Christians. The word used for left is “**aphiemi**” and means abandon, leave behind, reject, let go, neglect, set aside, etc. Indeed, it is clear that this cannot pertain to the Christians but rather, the Jews. It is seen here that the rapturists at least have the “who’s who” correct while the preterists are mistaken. The place where the rapturists are wrong is in the timing and nature of the event. This event is the gathering of the elect into the spiritual kingdom of God. It is the same event in 1 Cor. 15:50-58. It is the same event described by Paul in 1 Thess. 4:13-17.

The phrase, “**Wherever the corpse is, there the eagles will be gathered,**” must fit the context in both Matthew and Luke. So what is this actually a reference to? It is not meant to be a grotesque metaphor, depicting death of multitudes. Such would not fit the context and so it must be rejected. The dead body is not to represent the Jews nor are the eagles to represent the Romans. Rather, I feel it is a general reference to the gathering of the elect. At times we tend to be too critical with simple metaphors and parables. We try to allegorize each symbol within, fitting it exactly to a physical reality, when many times the general idea is all that was being conveyed by the speaker or writer. This same idea could be shown with other metaphors such as wolves gathered to a wounded elk, ants gathered at a drop of syrup, or locusts gathered at a field of green corn. Christ is not directly substituted with a wounded elk, drop of syrup, or field of corn. Nor are the elect substituted with wolves, ants or locusts. The concept to be grasped is that a natural gathering would occur at one common source of attraction.

Digging too deep in a parable is just as dangerous as skimming over it without stopping to think about it’s meaning. That is why Revelation has suffered with all the bazaar interpretations by the Hal Lindseys of the world. They attempt to make each and every little symbol fit into their preconceived idea of what the book is about. It is forced into a

context that revolves around themselves and the modern world in which they live. The NT should not be looked at as if it were some elaborate scavenger hunt, nor is it an almanac for seeing the future.

**42-44** Be alert, for you do not know which **day** your Lord is coming. He told them earlier that he would come in that generation and he told them the signs to look for. The day they would not know. Be ready for the Son of man is coming at an **hour** you do not think. The rough time frame was made known, the signs were laid out plainly so they could know when the time was near, but the day and hour were not given.

**45-51** This parable puts into perspective the time idea of these events. It in no way portrays an extended period of time. In fact it teaches against people saying it is a long time coming.

### **A Final Consideration**

In going over these words of Jesus in Matthew 24, its parallels and related passages, I can see that perhaps the “parousia” did **not** occur at the burning of the temple. Although the preterists all teach the “parousia” took place at the destruction of the temple, I can see an inconsistency. I don’t think the “parousia” happened at the last day. The resurrection of the dead, yes. The fullness of the kingdom, yes. The gathering of the elect, yes. But not the “parousia.” Jesus was very emphatic about the believers being alert and watchful. What was going to come like a thief in the night or a trap? Was it the burning of the temple? No. That day came when the Christians fled to the hills. Perhaps we need to view the “parousia” as beginning at that point—suddenly, and continuing on for the next 3-1/2 years till Jerusalem was destroyed. Maybe even more correctly as continuing on indefinitely. “Parousia” means “presence.” The Lord must still be present, for his dwelling is with his people. []

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