

AN INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 24—25

Part VII

by Thomas Ice

Matthew 24:6 says, “And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.” Previously I dealt with the first half of this verse, but the second half makes an important statement.

THAT IS NOT YET THE END

Since wars and rumors of wars must take place, there would be a tendency to think that the end is upon them, but such is not the case. In fact, this warning has been ignored down through church history. Too often many have thought that because of military conflicts that the end of the age has come.¹ With the current war against terrorism in which the United States and Israel are currently engaged, some might be tempted to think that this is a sign of the end. While I do think that we could be near the end of the church age, it would not be for that reason.² To what does “that is not yet the end” refer?

I have previously shown that verses 4–31 cover the time period known as the seventieth week of Daniel or more popularly called the tribulation period. Thus, Christ is telling His disciples that when one sees the beginning of the birth pangs—the first few seal judgments of Revelation 6—then that is not the end of the seven-year tribulation period, but just the beginning. Many more events must unfold before one can “straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28).

It could be possible that America’s impending attack on Iraq could set off a series of events that could culminate in the beginning of the tribulation. Let me make it clear: I am not saying that these current events will do that, only that they could! We do not know this; we are still living in the church age, which will end when the rapture takes place prior to the beginning of the tribulation. So no matter what happens in the next few months, they will not be specific events that are prophesied in the Bible; Scripture does not prophesy church age geo-political events.

NATIONS AND KINGDOMS ON THE RISE

The first half of Matthew 24:7 says, “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” Immediately we notice a difference between our Lord’s use of “nation” and “kingdom.” This is an important distinction, as we will shortly see.

First, I want to examine the usage of the conjunction “for.” Does the Greek word *gar* refer to the preceding or following context? Dana and Mantey tell us in their grammar that *gar* “may express: (a) a *ground* or *reason*, (b) an *explanation*, (c) a *confirmation* or *assurance*.”³ All nuances of the use of *gar* are what we might call resultant in scope. This would mean that verse 7 is “introducing a reason” or is “explanatory”⁴ of the preceding statement from verse 6. M’Neile asserts that *gar* “links the verse with the preceding.”⁵ This means that Christ is not introducing something totally new in verse 7. It means that the “wars and rumors of wars” of verse 6 are happening because of verse 7. So what is happening in verse 7?

The Greek word for “nation” is *ethnos*. It simply means “people” or if used of a national group of people it means “nation.”⁶ Our English word “ethnic” is derived from this Greek word. Since *ethnos* is set against *ethnos* in this context, it must mean a “nation,” like Canada or Mexico. On the other hand, the Greek word for “kingdom” is *basileia*. This word simply means “the territory ruled over by a king.”⁷ James Morison says, “Literally, *upon nation*. One nation shall rise in its anger to come *down upon* another.”⁸ But what is the relationship between nation and kingdom?

At the very least nation and kingdom are synonyms for national entities. However, it appears to me from the context that there is a progression from nation (*ethnos*) to a confederation of nations that form a kingdom (*basileia*). Morison says that the notion of

kingdom could include “greater communities, or empire, embracing within one political sphere various distinct nationalities.”⁹ If this is the case, then the passage is saying that nations will be fighting against nations and groups of nations will also be fighting against each other. This would be similar to the alliance during the Cold War where NATO was alienated against the Warsaw Pact. M’Neile says, “The horrors described are not local disturbances, but are spread over the known world; nations and kingdoms are in hostility with one another (not divided against itself, as in xii. 25, Is. xix. 2).”¹⁰

PRETERIST DISTRACTION

Preterist Gary DeMar, of course, believes that this was fulfilled in the first century. He says the following:

The *Annals of Tacitus*, covering the period from A.D. 14 to the death of Nero in A.D. 68, describes the tumult of the period with phrases such as “disturbances in Germany,” “commotions in Africa,” “commotions in Thrace,” “insurrections in Gaul,” “intrigues among the Parthians,” “the war in Britain,” and “the war in Armenia.” Wars were fought from one end of the empire to the other. With this description we can see further fulfillment: “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matt. 24:7).¹¹

As usual, when one examines the preterist view on a specific matter closely it does not correspond to what the passage is actually saying. Tacitus is describing internal conflict within the Roman Empire, not “nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” Craig Evans notes that this passage speaks of “the expectation of global warfare and chaos However, there were no major wars prior to the Jewish revolt.”¹² Meyer declares: “As for the Parthian wars and the risings that took place some ten years after in Gaul and Spain, they had no connection whatever with Jerusalem or Judea.”¹³ Commentator, M. F. Sadler is on the mark when he notes the following about the parallel passage in Mark:

If this verse is the sequence of the previous one, then it can hardly refer to the time before the destruction of Jerusalem; for then the Roman power kept the peace of the world. It is consequently explained by many commentators as fulfilled in various local tumults between the Jews who were scattered everywhere, and the various Gentile nations amongst whom they dwelt. But this by no means answers to such expressions as, “nation against nation,” and “kingdom against kingdom.” They seem rather to refer to such a time as the present, when the civilized world is divided into many separate nationalities.¹⁴

If this was the case one hundred twenty-five years ago, concerning the state of nationalism, how much more are we in that condition in our own day? Sadler adds the following comment at the parallel passage in his commentary on Luke:

I have noticed that these international conflicts seem to look rather to these latter times, when Europe and the adjacent part of Asia and Africa are divided into so many independent sovereignties, than to a time when there was but one great empire, which, as it were kept the peace amongst the smaller nationalities.¹⁵

FUTURE FULFILLMENT

Taking into account verses six and seven, this passage is describing future events that will take place during the first part of the tribulation. Since Matthew 24:6-7 is parallel to the second seal judgment in Revelation 6:3-4, it is further fixed within Scripture as part of the future time of tribulation. Revelation 6:4 says, “And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one

another; and a great sword was given to him.” Thus, early in the tribulation the antichrist is involved in warfare against nations and kingdoms (see also Dan. 7:8, 23–24; 9:36–45).

Interestingly senior British diplomat Robert Cooper, who has helped to shape British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s view of the world, has written an article that provides insight as to why Blair has been one of U. S. president George W. Bush’s strongest supporters for preemptive military action in Iraq.¹⁶ Cooper’s view of history holds that for the past few centuries the world has seen the rise of nationalism, which has led to international instability. He believes that we are now in the process of moving toward a time of postmodern internationalism, with global coalitions such as the European Union as the transitional stage. Cooper believes that military force is warranted by the international community when there are renegade states like Iraq that refuse to enter into cooperation with this postmodern arrangement. Cooper explains:

What is the origin of this basic change in the state system? The fundamental point is that “the world’s grown honest”. A large number of the most powerful states no longer want to fight or conquer. It is this that gives rise to both the pre-modern and postmodern worlds. Imperialism in the traditional sense is dead, at least among the Western powers.¹⁷

He goes on to say, “The EU is the most developed example of a postmodern system.”¹⁸

Since we are in a transition from a pre-modern to a postmodern world, then “The challenge to the postmodern world is to get used to the idea of double standards.”¹⁹ What does he mean? Since there are nations like Iraq who will not come willingly into this wonderful new international community, then they have to be dealt with in the old-fashioned way—militarily. Thus, unlike old liberalism, which tends to be pacifistic, the new liberalism is selectively militant. Cooper calls for “a new kind of imperialism” that is built upon economic unity, while dealing militarily with dissent. This is why Cooper concludes his essay with a call for a “cooperative empire, like Rome.”²⁰

It is not surprising to me that as we see the world currently being set for post-rapture events that a European intellectual would call for a revival of the Roman Empire, but with a new postmodern twist. How interesting that the Bible envisions a similar setup during the tribulation under the antichrist. We can see from a proper interpretation of biblical passages that Scripture calls for a future time as described in Matthew 24:6-7. We should not be surprised that the same God who wrote that Scripture is moving to bring its fulfillment to pass, likely in the near future. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ For an endless supply of examples see Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour: Christianity’s Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2000).

² See my views in Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, *The Truth About The Signs of The Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997); or Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, *Prophecy Watch: What to Expect in the Days to Come* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998), pp. 9–76.

³ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, [1927] 1955), p. 242.

⁴ Dana and Mantey, *Grammar*, p. 243.

⁵ Alan Hugh M’Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: MacMillan, 1915), p. 345.

⁶ William F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 217.

⁷ Arndt and Gingrich. *Lexicon*, p. 134.

⁸ James Morison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (Boston: N. J. Bartlett & Co., 1882), p. 355.

⁹ Morison, *Mark*, p. 355.

¹⁰ M'Neile, *Matthew*, p. 346.

¹¹ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, (Power Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 79. For a similar view see also Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Press, 1999), pp. 47–49.

¹² Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 8:27–16:20*, Vol. 34B (Dallas: Word Books, 2001), p. 307.

¹³ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to The Gospel of Matthew*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1879), vol. 2, p. 130.

¹⁴ M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: with Notes Critical and Practical* (London: George Bell and Sons, [1884] 1898), p. 298.

¹⁵ M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: with Notes Critical and Practical* (London: George Bell and Sons, [1886] 1911), pp. 527–28.

¹⁶ Robert Cooper, "The New Liberal Imperialism," in the *Observer Worldview Extra* (London: April 7, 2002) at the following Internet address:

www.observer.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,680094,00.html.

¹⁷ Cooper, "New Imperialism."

¹⁸ Cooper, "New Imperialism."

¹⁹ Cooper, "New Imperialism."

²⁰ Cooper, "New Imperialism."