

AN INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 24—25

Part IX

by Thomas Ice

“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name.”

—Matthew 24:9

After painting a global scenario, Jesus now turns to personal consequences that will take place during the seventieth-week of Daniel, known as the tribulation. In fact Christ uses the word “tribulation” for the first time in His discourse. There are a number of issues that arise from this passage as it relates to the different interpretative approaches to our Lord’s discourse.

JEWISH ORIENTATION

Verse 9 provides further reason why the tribulation is directed toward the Jewish remnant. “The temporal adverb *tote* links the persecution, killing and hatred with the famines, earthquakes and wars.”¹ James R. Gray explains the significance of the word “then” and its impact upon the immediate passage as follows:

Matthew uses the word “*then*” throughout the discourse (24:9,10,14,16,21,23,30,40). The Greek word is *tote*. Matthew uses this word 90 times in his gospel, more than the rest of the New Testament writers combined. The word is “a demonstrative adverb of time, denoting at that time.”² The word then in verse 9 means simultaneously as the events that occur in verses 4-8. Matthew places this persecution with the beginning of sorrows. This presents a problem for those who believe that the church age separates Matthew 24:8 and 9. They look upon Matthew 24:4-8 as historical, and verse 9 as future. However, the word “*then*” makes it difficult to hold such a view. The word does not mean after the beginning of sorrows, but at the same time or simultaneously with the beginning of sorrows. Thus, verse 9, cannot be projected into the second half of the Tribulation. There is no sequence here, for this persecution will take place during or at the same time, as the beginning of sorrows. And as we have seen, the beginning of sorrows refers to the early tribulation period, and corresponds to the events of Revelation 6.³

Since the focus of the Olivet Discourse is Jerusalem centered, most likely Jesus has in view Jewish persecution. However, there is no doubt that Christians of all stripes will receive similar harsh treatment during this time of tribulation. “The persons addressed in this division, are, as I suppose, Jewish believers in Jesus: holding in spiritual things, the place which ‘the twelve’ of that day held.”⁴ declares Robert Govett. This sentence only appears in Matthew’s account of the Olivet Discourse, perhaps because of his Jewish orientation.

The “they” must refer to those described in verse 10, which reads as follows: “And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another.” “They” are the traitors who betray their brethren and deliver them up to death. “They” will be judged for their actions at the “sheep and goat” judgment as recorded in Matthew 25:31–46.

Preterists believe that because the second person plural “you” is used here that these events must have happened in the first century. Gary DeMar says, “notice how many times Jesus uses the plural *you* in Matthew 24 and in the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21.”⁵ The plural you, in this context, is a cooperate expression, for the Jewish people as a whole, which includes multiple generations. James Morison explains, “When the Saviour says *you* He is not confining His attention *specifically* to Peter, James, John and the

other apostles, as individuals. He is speaking to them *generically*, as representatives of the entire body of His disciples. If this fact be overlooked, nothing will be understood.”⁶ Morison’s point can be well applied to the preterists, who misjudge the timing of Christ’s discourse, with the result that from their perspective “nothing will be understood.”

Preterist, Gary DeMar says, “Tacitus says that Nero, for the conflagration of Rome, persecuted the Christians, . . . But between A.D. 30 and 70, the tribulation of the church experienced was a fulfillment of the specific prophecy outlined in Matthew 24:9.”⁷ However, such could not be the case as noted by H. A. W. Meyer who said, “It is a mistake to suppose that we have here a reference to Nero’s persecution (proceeding upon an erroneous interpretation of the well-known ‘odio humani generis’ in Tacit. *Ann.* xv. 44, see Orelli on the passage).”⁸ M. F. Sadler also speaks against DeMar’s notion when he said, “Do not such words look to a far more world-wide hatred from without, and a far more generally diffused declension within the Church, than was possible before the year 72?”⁹ Further, William Hendriksen notes the following: “The very expression ‘all nations’ clearly shows that Jesus is not thinking solely of what happens during the life-time of the apostles.”¹⁰

The Old Testament teaches that the tribulation will be a time of great persecution toward the Jewish people specifically (Jer. 30:7, 11, 23–24; Ezek. 20:33–44; 22:17–22; Dan. 7:25; 12:1–3; Hosea 5:15; Zeph. 1:7–2:3). The New Testament echoes this teaching as well (Matt. 10:17–22; 24:9, 15–24; Mark 13:9–20; Luke 21:12–19; Rev. 13:7a; 18:24). The entire chapter of Revelation 12 is devoted to depicting the future persecution of the Jewish remnant during the second half of the seven-year tribulation period by Satan himself and his partner in crime—the antichrist known as the beast.

TRIBULATION

The timing of this passage is the first half of the seven-year tribulation. Gray explains the timing of these events as follows:

Matthew writes in precise chronological language so that we may know the time of the events spoken of. . . . *First*, in the progression of terms used to show movement of thought. This progression is seen in the term tribulation. Notice that Matthew moves from “*tribulation*” (v. 9, KJV “to be afflicted”), to “*great tribulation*” (v. 21), to “*after the tribulation*” (v. 29). This progression of thought falls naturally into the periods of Daniels’ Seventieth Week. Daniel saw the week as divided into two halves. The dividing factor is when the Antichrist breaks the covenant with Israel in the middle of the week. The terminology of the discourse suggests that Jesus was using Daniels’ prophecy as a point of reference for this discourse. Both Daniel and Jesus divide the week with the same event: the abomination of desolation (v. 15). Matthew refers to the first half of the week referred to by the term “tribulation” (vv. 9-14), the last half of the week referred to by the term “great tribulation” (vv. 15-28); and then the events after the events after the week by the phrase “after the tribulation” (vv. 29-31).¹¹

Pre-wrath rapturist¹² Marvin Rosenthal declares, “Of the four times the Lord spoke of *tribulation* in a prophetic context, He was speaking of the Great Tribulation which begins in the middle of Daniel’s seventieth week—precisely three and one-half years into it.”¹³ The four passages he mentions are Matthew 24:21, 29, and Mark 13:19, 24.¹⁴ Rosenthal conveniently excludes Matthew 24:9. Certainly Matthew 24:9 is in a prophetic context. Davies and Allison classify it as such.¹⁵ It seems obvious that since Matthew 24:9 occurs in the first half of the tribulation, that Rosenthal had to exclude verse 9 in order to make his statement fit the erroneous theory he advocates. Clearly the word “tribulation,” in Matthew 24:9, appears in a context that references the first half of the tribulation.

MARTYRDOM

The persecution, which Matthew notes here, is a future one that will take place in the first half of the tribulation. The verb, “deliver” is the same one used of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus (Matt. 26:15) and supports the notion that this future deliverance unto death will be a similar betrayal of the Lord’s people. John MacArthur says, “*Paradidômi (will deliver)* has the basic meaning of giving over and was often used in a technical sense for arrest by the police or military (see Matt. 4:12).”¹⁶

The martyrdom described in this passage, which occurs in the first half of the tribulation, is to be seen as a parallel passage to the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9–11. Revelation 6:9 says, “And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained.” Arno Gaebelin explains the parallel as follows:

And now under the fifth seal we do not behold another rider, but instead of it we hear the souls underneath the altar, that had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they gave, crying out with a loud voice, saying, How long? (Rev. vi:9-11.) Who are these? Not the saints of the church. . . . They are such of the remnant of the Jews who began to give their witness for the Word of God after the church had departed and they suffered martyrdom in consequence of their faithful testimony. It is exactly that of which our Lord speaks next in His discourse. “Then shall they deliver you up to tribulation and shall kill you; ye will be hated of all the nations for my names sake.”¹⁷

This parallel continues to sustain the notion that verses 4–14 of Matthew 24 are parallel to the seal judgments of Revelation 6. Such a parallel supports my contention that verses 4–14 describe the first half of the tribulation, which is also known as the seventieth week of Daniel. Thus, wars, earthquakes, famines, and persecution of believers in our own day are not signs that relate to the end-times. These prophetically significant events will take place during the first half of the coming tribulation.

The motive for the martyrdom of Christ’s disciples during the tribulation will be “on account of My name.” Just as we see in Revelation 12 that the dragon (Satan himself) will pour out his wrath on the Jewish remnant in the second half of the tribulation because of His hatred of God, so will these disciples of the Lord be killed “on account of My name.” Since these unbelievers will not be able to get at the Lord Himself, they will go after the Lord’s disciples.

CONCLUSION

We see from an examination of Matthew 24:9 that more reasons are provided for the futurist understanding of the Olivet Discourse, as against the preterist. We also see that our understanding of this verse also provides further reasons to understand that the birth pangs of Matthew 24:4–14 refer to the first half of the seven-year tribulation. Further coordination between the events of Matthew 24:4–14 are seen in the parallel of verse 9 with the fifth seal judgment of Revelation 6:9–11. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament*, 18 vols. (Bowling Green, KY: Renaissance Press, 1978), vol. 3. p. 281.

² W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Fleming H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, NJ, n.d.), p. 123.

³ James R. Gray, *Prophecy on The Mount: A Dispensational Study of the Olivet Discourse* (Chandler, AZ: Berean Advocate Ministries, 1991), p. 54.

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- ⁴ Robert Govett, *The Prophecy on Olivet* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co., [1881] 1985), p. 22.
- ⁵ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 58.
- ⁶ James Morison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1883), p. 460.
- ⁷ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, p. 83.
- ⁸ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to The Gospel of Matthew*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1879), vol. 2, p. 132.
- ⁹ M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: with Notes Critical and Practical* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1898), p. 356.
- ¹⁰ William Hendricksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 853.
- ¹¹ Gray, *Prophecy on The Mount*, pp. 53-54.
- ¹² I hesitate to use the term “pre-wrath rapture” of Rosenthal’s view, since the pre-trib position is certainly pre-wrath as well. Other rapture nomenclature refers to when the rapture will take place in relation to the seven-year tribulation. Thus, Rosenthal’s view would more aptly be titled the three-quarters rapture view.
- ¹³ Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of The Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), p. 105.
- ¹⁴ Rosenthal, *Pre-Wrath Rapture*, pp. 104-05.
- ¹⁵ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), vol. 3, p. 341.
- ¹⁶ John MacArthur, *The New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24–28* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), p. 23.
- ¹⁷ Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, [1910] 1961), pp. 483–84.