

Lesson Twelve

(Matt. Ch. 24-25)

As with Daniel, so with Matthew 24. Many writers and teachers of Bible prophecies have commingled the predictions of Jesus in Matthew 24 with Revelation and Daniel to form their bizzare, unrealistic and hypothetical pictures of the "rapture, tribulation, and millennium." The application of accepted hermeneutical principles will clearly show that the first half of Matthew 24 applies only to the destruction of Judaism.

A U.P. survey says the typical American is 27; does not read one book a year; is materialistic; satisfied with small pleasures; bored with theological disputations. Although he may attend church 27 times a year, he is not interested in the supernatural . . . concerned with neither heaven or hell . . . has no interest whatever in immortality. His principal interests are football, hunting, fishing and car-tinkering.

Everywhere we look, young people are being taught that the present moment, however exciting or ridiculous, is the thing that matters and that *deliberate rejection of the past or future* is the only alternative left to life today! Some are saying that Henry Ford was right when he said, "History is bunk," and that even a study of history will be of no use to coming generations.

In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus says just the opposite! History has a meaning—a divine meaning. Some sage once said, "The past is prologue." Jesus

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is telling His apostles, and all the world, that history is headed for a goal. History is not a record of unintelligible accidents. Indeed, the Bible is God's editorial column analyzing the daily news. In the Bible we see history's meaning from a God-perspective.

History, looked at from the divine record, is a series of judgments and redemptions. God's Book teaches it—history confirms it. God judged the world through the Flood, but He redeemed it there also. God judged Egypt but redeemed His covenant people. God judged the Israelites in the captivities, but He also redeemed them from the dispersion. Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24) is a prediction of a final judgment of Judaism for rejecting the Messiah. But out of this great judgment will come the victory of the Messiah's new Israel (the church) and redemption for all who will answer the invitation.

Matthew 24 (esp. 24:1-35) has been mishandled, misinterpreted and misapplied by many religious factions. It is being severely abused by so-called "prophecy preachers" today who are confusing thousands of believers.

THE MESSIAH HAS COME AUTHORITY IN HISTORY'S TIMES

by Paul T. Butler

Matthew 24:1-35

Introduction

I. HARROWING TALK

- A. Complexity of this text makes it essential that the student avail himself of a harmony of the gospel accounts as an aid to understanding it.

The two other Synoptic gospels, Mark and Luke, have the same discourse but with some additions.

See, Mark 13:1-31 and Luke 21:5-33.

- B. Second, it is *imperative* that the student know that immediately preceding this discourse on the destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism, Jesus uttered the following two eschatologically *startling* statements:

1. He condemned the Pharisees, denouncing them as "sons of hell" (Mt. 23:15) and pronounced upon them "all the blood" of the righteous shed upon the earth (Mt. 23:31-35). Most Jews would consider the fall of the Pharisees the end of the Jewish "world." The Pharisees were the "keepers" of the Jewish culture and system.

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2. He declared the "house" of Judaism "*desolate and forsaken*" (Mt. 23:36-39). This is terminology Jeremiah and Ezekiel used to warn their contemporaries of the Babylonian captivity and destruction of the city and Temple by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 19:8; Lam. 1:4; Ezek. ch. 8-11).
- C. Third, it is *imperative* that the student know that *right after* the discussion of the widow's mite offering into the Temple treasury (Lk. 21:1-4 and Mk. 12:41-44), Jesus preached the alarming sermon on Death and Life, (Jn. 12:20-50). This also, just before the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, contained startling statements!
 1. Jesus said, "Now is the judgment (Gr. *crisis*) of this world (Gr. *cosmos*) now is the ruler of this world thrown out (Gr. *ekblethesetai exo*)."
 2. The word "*cosmos*" means, "order, system, establishment."
 3. Thus, the statements "Now is the crisis of this cosmos" in itself was enough to precipitate the questions of the apostles about the destruction of Judaism and Jerusalem.
 4. It was very plain to the apostles Jesus was predicting the destruction of the present Jewish order, involving the desolation and forsakenness of the Temple and the nation—in that generation!

II. HEBREW TRADITIONS

- A. Jewish scribes had divided their eschatology into three eras
 1. *Olam hazzeh*: the order then existing
 2. *Athid labho*: the age to come after that existing order
 3. *Olam habba*: the world to come
 4. In some rabbinic tradition, the age to come and the world to come blended into one.
 5. The existing order was to be succeeded by the "days of the Messiah" which would stretch into the coming age and end with the world to come.
 6. According to the rabbis, the birth of the Messiah would be unknown by His contemporaries; he would appear, carry on his work, then disappear—probably for 45 days; reappear, destroy the hostile powers of the world (notably "Edom"—which symbolized Rome, the 4th and last world empire listed by the prophet Daniel). Israelites would be brought back to Palestine from all over the world through miraculous deliverances and, according to the Midrash, all circumcised Israelites would then be released from Gehenna, and the dead Jews raised

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(according to some, by the Messiah). This resurrection would take place in Palestine so that those who had been buried elsewhere would have to roll underground—in great pain—until they reached the holy land of Palestine.

- B. In the coming age, *athid labho*, the rabbis wrote that all resistance to God would be concentrated in the great war of Gog and Magog (cf. Ezek. ch. 38-39), and there would be an intensification and focusing of all wickedness upon Israel in her land.
1. Israel's enemies would 3 times assault the Holy City to destroy it, but each time be repelled. The city would suffer ravage, but not complete destruction.
 2. When Israel's enemy was destroyed completely, the Holy City would be gloriously rebuilt and inhabited. The new city would be lifted nine miles high, and extend from Joppa to the gates of Damascus.
 3. The new Temple would contain everything which had been absent in Herod's temple (golden candelabra, the ark of the covenant, the heaven-lit fire on the altar, the Shekinah and the cherubim).
 4. The ancient ceremonies of the Mosaic Law, plus rabbinic traditions would be practiced.
- C. The end of that age would blend right into the world to come, *olam habba*, a glorious period of holiness, forgiveness and peace.
1. In this new age and circumstances, angels would cut gems 45 feet square and place them in the city's gates.
 2. The walls of the city would be of silver, gold and precious gems, and precious jewels would be scattered all over the land which every Israelite would be at liberty to take.
 3. Jerusalem would be as large as all Palestine and Palestine as large as all the world.
 4. Wheat would grow as high as the mountains and the wind would convert the grain into flour and blow it into the valleys of the land.
 5. Every woman was to bear a child, daily, so that ultimately every Israelite family would number as many as all Israel at the time of the Exodus.
 6. All sickness and disease would pass away; Israelites would not die; some Gentiles would live hundreds of years. The Messiah was to rule the world from Jerusalem which would be the capital of the world and take the place of Rome.
 7. The time of all this was among the seven things, according to the rabbis, unknown to man.

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- D. A war, a revival of that of Gog and Magog, would close the Messianic era.
1. The nations, which had to this point given tribute to the Messiah, would rebel against him, and he would destroy them by the breath of his mouth. Gentile rebellion would be 7 years in duration.
 2. Israel would be left alone on the face of the earth.
 3. Then the final judgment commences.
 4. There is no resurrection for Gentiles at all, except to die again.
 5. Gehenna, where all Jews but the perfectly righteous ones are kept in a sort of purgatory, gives up these dead Jews who are delivered to Abraham in heaven.
 6. Final judgment is to be held in the valley of Jehoshaphat by God, leading the heavenly Sanhedrin, composed of the elders of Israel.
 7. After judgment there would be a renewal of heaven and earth and the full implementation of *olam habba*, the world to come.
- E. Now when Jesus spoke of the judgment of the Jewish hierarchy, the desolation of Jerusalem, and the "crisis of the cosmos," the apostles concluded that such catastrophic events would be signalling the end of the existing order, *olam hazzeh*, and the ushering in of *athid labho*, the coming age, and perhaps, *olam habba*, the world to come.
1. The disciples began to point, *incredulously*, at the huge stones of the Temple!
Some of the great stones of Herod's Temple were, according to Josephus, 25 cubits long, 8 cubits high and 12 cubits wide. Using 18 inches to a cubit, one of these stones would be 38 ft. long, 12 ft. high and 18 ft. wide. Eight large sized American automobiles could be stacked into those dimensions.
 2. The apostles asked three questions which indicates how influential the rabbinic interpretations had been on them, and how confused they were trying to reconcile that with Jesus' statements.
 - a. Their first question was: "*When* will all ths destruction be?" (Mt. 24:3a; Mk. 13:4a; Lk. 21:7a).
 - b. Their second question was: "*What* will be the sign that *You* are coming?" (Mt. 24:3b; Mk. 13:4b; Lk. 21:7b).
 - c. Their third question was: "*What* will be the sign of the *consummation of the age* (Gr. *sunteleias tou aionos*)?" (Mt. 24:3c).

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3. Recognizing the dangers inherent in their confusion, Jesus sets out immediately to reveal a number of future events and to specify that they are *not* signs of the rabbinic theories coming to pass, *nor* are they signs of the *consummation of the ages*.
At the end of His discourse, He tells them that there will be *no signs* of the *consummation* of the ages. (We will deal with that subject in the next lesson).
4. But for the immediate future of these apostles and other believers of their generation, He gives some very practical instructions so they would not be led astray when the destruction of the Jewish system began!
 - a. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish commonwealth would not take place for more than 30 years after Jesus died and was raised from the tomb and ascended to heaven.
 - b. It would begin in 66 A.D. and come to a climax in 70 A.D.
5. The apostles have not yet understood that Jesus must "go away." When He did return to His heavenly throne, they would long to have Him back (cf. Lk. 17:22). Great persecutions were to come upon them. They must live in daily expectation and faith in His promises. They would be vulnerable to false expectations of a coming messianic age as portrayed by the rabbis, because the circumstances preceding the destruction of Jerusalem were to be similar to rabbinic messianic eschatology. So Jesus spoke His warnings.

Discussion

- I. PRELIMINARY SIGNS OF DESTRUCTION, Mt. 24:4-14 (Mk. 13:5-13; Lk. 21:5-19)
 - A. Pseudo Christs
 1. Jesus warned the apostles that their generation would experience the rise and fall of many who would come in His name, saying they were the Messiah (Anointed One), but the 1st century Christians were not to be led astray by these claims.
 1. In spite of all the excitement and troubles attending these pretenders, He was not then returning, nor was "the time at hand."
 2. Pseudo-Christ's coming to proclaim the new age would precede the desolation of Jerusalem. Jesus predicted.
 3. There were many such imposters who deluded multitudes of the 1st century Jews into following them, claiming they would prove they were the Christ by exhibiting wonders and signs

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- by the power of God (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities*, XX, VIII, 5).
4. About 44 A.D. during the rule of Palestine by Fadus, Roman procurator, a man by the name of Theudas (*not* the one of Acts 5:36) gathered a large band of followers claiming he was a miracle working deliverer. About 54 A.D. (during the reign of Felix) an Egyptian claimed to be a deliverer with prophetic powers. Such pseudo-Messiahs were plentiful.
 5. All these came to a climax 62 years *after* the destruction of Jerusalem in the great rebellion against Rome under the false Messiah, Bar Kokhba, 132-135 A.D.

B. Presaging Crises

1. Wars and rumors of wars

- a. The Greek word *polemous*, "war," is the word from which we get the English word, "polemics" and means "to fight."
- b. Rome was having increasing difficulty with civil war among Roman emperors and army generals.
- c. There was also an ever recurring necessity for Rome to defend the empire against foreign invaders.
- d. Jesus is probably predicting the increasing rebellious attitude of the Jews against Rome when He says this.

Herod Agrippa, given his uncle Philip's territory by Caligula, set out to revenge his uncle Philip against Herod Antipas who had stolen Philip's wife (Herodias). Agrippa spread the *rumor* to Rome that Antipas was conspiring with the Parthians against Rome and would make war. He *rumored* that Antipas had in his arsenal at Tiberias enough armor to equip 70,000 men.

- e. Riots broke out in Alexandria, Egypt, between Egyptians and Jews of that city (37-38 A.D.).
- f. A riot broke out in Jamnia (western Judea) in 39 A.D. when some Gentiles erected an altar to the Roman emperor and the Jews tore it down.
- g. The Roman emperor sent two Roman legions (12,000 men) to Jerusalem to set up his statue in the Jewish Temple. Jews vowed to resist to the last Jewish death. Some Jewish Christians in Palestine thought this impending blood-bath was a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy here. Caligula was assassinated, however, before this could be enforced.
- h. Claudius was forced to put down another riot in Alexandria with bloodshed (53 A.D.).
- i. After the death of Herod Agrippa I (in 44 A.D.), the Roman

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emperor again imposed a rule of procurators upon Judea which deeply agitated the Jews. And, in the days of the procurator Cumanus (48 A.D.), a Roman soldier from the garrison in Antonia exposed his genitals to the Passover crowds which infuriated them. The Jews rioted and Roman soldiers killed hundreds of Jews in suppressing it (Josephus, *Antiquities*, XX, V, 3).

- j. There were continuing frontier disputes between Jews and Samaritans—Jews and Gentiles rioted in Caesarea (cf. *Israel and The Nations*, F. F. Bruce, pg. 197-225).
- k. Luke says, “. . . when you hear of wars and tumults . . .” The Greek word for tumults is *akatastasia*, “confusion, instability.” All this was to precede the destruction of Jerusalem.

Luke says Jesus warned the apostles, “do not be terrified (Gr. *ptoeo*, “frightened, intimidated,”) for this must first take place, but the end (of Jerusalem) will not be at once” Lk. 21:9. WHY THE EXHORTATION AGAINST BEING ALARMED?

Because Jesus is giving a very plain prediction of the holocaust coming upon Jerusalem and Judaism. But He has a work for these apostles to do in Jerusalem and Palestine which will take years to accomplish (Lk. 27:47; Acts 1:8). He does not want them to be terrified when wars and instability comes so that they will flee Jerusalem before the real holocaust comes.

2. Earthquakes and famines

- a. Jesus warns them not to be terrified, even when these things happened or were rumored and headlined about the Roman empire.
- b. Even such disasters as these were *not* signalling the immediate holocaust He was predicting.
- c. One famine, recorded in the New Testament (Acts 11:29ff.) occurred about 45-46 A.D. and was very severe in Palestine. Luke tells how the church at Antioch sent relief to their Jewish brethren in Palestine. Josephus tells how Queen Helena, an Abiabene convert to Judaism (Abdiabene is east of the Tigris River) sent relief to the Jews for the same famine (Josephus, *Antiquities*, XX, II, 5).
- d. Many destructive earthquakes have been recorded in the history of Syria which borders on Palestine. The Hauran

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- beyond the Jordan is covered with signs of violent earthquakes, and the cities on the coast of Palestine have suffered many quakes.
- e. The New Testament documents a great earthquake in Palestine at the death of Christ (Mt. 27:51-54); one at Christ's resurrection (Mt. 28:2); one at Philippi in Macedonia (Acts 16:26).
 - f. Josephus mentions an earthquake in the reign of Herod "such as had not happened at any other time, which was very destructive to men and cattle" (*Antiquities*, IV, V, 2).
 - g. Many such earthquakes could have happened and been recorded but the records destroyed when Jerusalem was burned and when Rome was burned.
 - h. Roman historians document numerous earthquakes in the 1st century in Rome 51 A.D.; Apamea; Laodicea 60 A.D.; Amporia 62 A.D.; Tacitus and Seneca both mention earthquakes in Asia, Achaia, Syria, Macedonia, Cyprus, Paphus, Crete and Italy.
 - i. There is at least one pestilence mentioned by Josephus in Babylon 40 A.D. which killed some 30,000 people (*Antiquities*, XVII, IX, 8) and one in Italy 66 A.D. recorded by Tacitus. Many others may have been documented but the documents destroyed.
3. Great signs from Heavens (Lk. 21:11)
- a. What Jesus probably meant by "great signs from heaven" were the catastrophies of "nature" such as volcanic eruptions, cyclones, meteors or other great storms from the heavens which often terrify men.
 - b. Josephus records the following signs which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem:
 - (1) a star resembling a sword stood over the city
 - (2) a comet that lasted a whole year
 - (3) at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, during the night, a bright light shone around the altar and the Temple so that it seemed broad daylight.
the eastern gate of the Temple, of solid brass, fastened with strong bolts and bars, requiring 20 men to shut, opened in the night of its own accord
 - (5) a great noise of a multitude was heard in the Temple saying, "Let us remove hence."
 - (6) chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds and surrounding the cities.

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(7) 4 years before the war began, Jesus, son of Ananus, came to the feast of Tabernacles, when the city was in peace and prosperity, and began to cry aloud, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house. . . ." etc. Upon being scourged, he would cry with every stroke, "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!"

Some of these were probably imaginative—but the very fact that Josephus records them indicates they were being rumored around. AND THAT IS THE WHOLE POINT OF JESUS' WARNINGS HERE—TO KEEP HIS DISCIPLES FROM BEING TERRIFIED AT SUCH RUMORS SO THEY MIGHT FLEE.

C. Persecuting Countrymen

1. Afflictions

- a. Severe persecutions to come upon His followers will *not* be signalling any imminent eschatological end.
- b. Up to the time of Jesus' death, there were no severe persecutions of His followers. The authorities had determined to kill Jesus, but His followers were still free of such malice.
- c. But immediately after His death, their tribulation would begin. Even this should not cause them to expect the imminent destruction of the Jewish commonwealth.

Even this should not terrify them into fleeing Jerusalem and neglecting to fulfill their commission to preach the gospel there first.

- d. As a matter of fact, being brought to trial in Jewish synagogues and prisons, and before Jewish rulers, would be an opportune "time for them to bear testimony" (Lk. 21:13).

2. Attitudes

- a. They were not to "meditate beforehand" how to answer when hailed before persecutors. Luke uses the Greek words *me promeletan* which mean primarily "have no concern prior to."
- b. The better way to translate the word is "be not anxious beforehand."
- c. In other words, Jesus exhorts those who anticipate being called to questioning before tribunals need not distress themselves beforehand that they will not be able to endure the questioning or not have sufficient knowledge to give the testimony that they should. What Jesus wants them to say *will be given them between* His prophecy here and the coming persecutions.

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- d. This is not a promise of Jesus that they will need no preparation between these times. They will indeed be given many things to say from their own eyewitnessed experiences (Jesus' death and resurrection).
 - e. Jesus did not want the apostles to let His predictions of the coming persecutions fill them with anxiety ahead of time so that they might hastily decide to flee from Palestine immediately upon His death.
 - f. He desired to warn them here, at this moment, they would have a testimony of historical facts which none of their adversaries would be able to contradict. They need not be afraid they would have nothing to say.
3. Apostasy (False teaching, lawlessness and indifference)
- a. All this would also characterize the Jewish society in which the apostles would live preceding the holocaust on the Jewish nation.
 - b. Persecution and apostasy is abundantly confirmed by pagan historians as well as by sacred history (New Testament) (cf. Gal. 1:7; 2:4; II Cor. 11:13-15; I Tim. 1:3-7; 1:19-20; II Tim. 3:8-9; Titus 1:10-11; Jude; II Pet. 2; Rev. 1:3; Acts 15:1, etc.)
 - c. The book of Acts thoroughly documents persecution of Christians and apostasy and lawlessness of the Jews before 70 A.D.
- D. Preaching of Christian gospel throughout the world.
1. That is also documented as having happened before 70 A.D.
 2. One must consider the Roman empire as the then civilized and traveled world.
 3. Cf. Rom. 1:5, 8; 10:18; 16:26; Col. 1:6; 1:23.
 4. It was the apostle Paul who made it abundantly clear in his epistle to the Hebrew Christians that Judaism was doomed and "near to passing away" (Heb. 8:13; 10:25; 12:25-29; 13:14).

And, so, very alarming words fell from the lips of Jesus. The apostles, combining with these words their undoubted knowledge of popular rabbinical traditions of the "coming age" were startled. Jesus wanted to allay their fears lest they be terrified into deserting their task. **SO HE REVEALED TO THE APOSTLES THESE EVENTS OF HISTORY BEFORE THEY CAME TO PASS IN ORDER THAT THEY MIGHT TRUST HIM AND CARRY OUT THEIR JOB.**

II. PRECISE SIGNS OF DESTRUCTION, 24:15-34 (Mk. 13:14-30; Lk. 21:20-32)

A. Pagan Profanation

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1. This, and the signs following, Jesus predicts will be plainly observable to the generation then living. **THEY ARE TO BE IMMEDIATE SIGNS THAT JUDAISM IS FORSAKEN AND DESOLATE AND THEY MEAN THAT THE END IS IMMINENT UPON JERUSALEM AND JUDAISM.**
2. The desolating sacrilege, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, set up where it ought not to be (Mark), **IS THE ROMAN ARMIES SURROUNDING THE CITY OF JERUSALEM,** according to Luke 21:20.
3. This fulfills Jesus' parable of the Marriage Feast of the King for His Son, which was treated with contempt. The "King" sent *His armies* and burned their city and destroyed the people, (Mt. 22:7).
4. Daniel predicted the desecration of the Temple and the city by Roman armies as the consequence of the Jew's rejecting their "Anointed Prince" 490 years after the restoration of the Jewish commonwealth in 457 B.C. (see Dan. 9:24-27).
5. After a series of Jewish uprisings and riots, Jerusalem was first besieged in November, 66 A.D. by the Roman legate of Syria, Cestius Gallus.
 - a. He had marched to Judea at that time with the Twelfth Legion and surrounded the city on orders from Nero. Gallus occupied Bezetha, (northern edge of Jerusalem) but concluded his forces were too small to take the rest of the city so he withdrew.
 - b. The Jews, assuming Divine providence had intervened to spare the city, took no advantage of the opportunity to flee. In fact, many Jews living in the immediate environs outside the city fled *into* the city for what they thought would be protection.
 - c. On the way back to Syria Gallus and his forces were ambushed by Jewish insurgents at Beth-horon and the Romans suffered great losses.
6. When Christians saw Gallus' first siege, remembering Jesus' prophecy, they fled to Pella when he withdrew to Syria. Eusebius writes in his *History*, ". . . the people of the church in Jerusalem, being commanded to leave and dwell in a city of Perea, called Pella, in accordance with a certain oracle which was uttered before the war to the approved men there by way of revelation. . . ."
7. Nero sent his general, Vespasian, with 60,000 men (ten legions) to Judea in the Spring of 67 A.D. He conquered all of Judea and was about to besiege Jerusalem, when he was called back to

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Rome after Nero's suicide. Vespasian became emperor and sent son, Titus Vespasian to Judea to put down the Jewish revolt.

- a. Titus recaptured the Tower of Antonia July 24, 70 A.D.
- b. August 5th, he caused the daily sacrifices of the Jewish priests to cease (see Dan. 9:27).
- c. August 27th the Temple gates were burned.
- d. August 29th (anniversary of Babylonian destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 B.C.), the Sanctuary itself was set on fire.
- e. While the sanctuary was burning, Roman soldiers brought their legionary standards (with the emperors image upon them) into the Temple area and offered sacrifices to the emperor there!
- f. September 26, A.D. 70, the whole city was in Titus' hands. All during the seige and assaults on the city by the Romans, the Jews within had been reduced to such desperation there were atrocities the Jews perpetrated upon one another almost too horrible and gruesome to recount.

B. Terrible Tribulations and Deceiving Deliverers

1. Jesus specifically and categorically states of this terrible holocaust on Jerusalem, ". . . for *these are* days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written" (Lk. 21:22).
 - a. Moses wrote that this would happen should the Jews reject the Prophet (cf. Deut. 18:15-18; 28:15-68).
 - b. Daniel prophesied these things would come to pass because the Jews would "cut off" their Anointed One (Dan. 9:24-27).
 - c. Jesus proclaimed they would "fill up the measure of their fathers . . . that upon them would come all the righteous blood shed on earth" (Mt. 23:31-36) because they were going to kill the Son of God.
2. Jesus said, "For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon *this* people" (Lk. 21:23), "for then will be great tribulation *such as* has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be," (Mt. 24:21; Mk. 13:19).
 - a. Some readers, confused, insist that such language cannot be referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, because there have been many tribulations since the destruction of Jerusalem much worse in statistics. Nazi Germany killed some 6,000,000 Jews in WWII. Then there is Hiroshima and Nagasaki—the prisons of Russian Siberia, etc.

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- b. There were worse disasters before Jerusalem—what about the Flood of Noah's day?
- c. The term, *such as*, in the description of Jesus, really does not refer to the statistical magnitude of the tribulation—it refers rather to the *kind* of tribulation.

Jesus is anticipating the uniqueness of the cause and effect of the suffering and affliction—not the quantity or number suffering. Because of a. and b. above, we must explain what Jesus said, then, by quality or uniqueness. Note the below:

- (1) This tribulation involved the final destruction of what once had been God's holy nation. This had never happened before. God rescued a remnant from captivity and restored their nationality. It will never happen again, since the church of Christ is now God's holy nation (I Pet. 2:9) and it will never be destroyed (Mt. 16:18) (Dan. 2:44).
- (2) The circumstances of the Jews trapped in Jerusalem was unique in all of history. God had withdrawn His presence. They were abandoned to their own evil. The residents turned on one another in hatred and panic, and inflicted on themselves atrocities more horrible than even the Romans could invent!
- (3) It was a tribulation suffered only by those Jews who had rejected Christ. Those who believed Jesus (esp. this prophecy) were saved from the disaster of 70 A.D.
- (4) The Bible was written for all time—the "atomic age" as well as that of bows and arrows. For Jesus to try to compare the tribulation of Roman warfare with Hiroshima would mean nothing to the apostles. So, Jesus is simply saying, "In the frame-of-reference of what you apostles know and can visualize, Jerusalem's suffering is going to be the greatest." This is no contradiction of Jesus' omniscience. He is, in fact, condescending to the human limitations of the apostles. He did this at other times too. He told them a few hours later, "I have many things to say to you which you are not presently able to bear" Jn. 16:12ff.
- (5) The holocaust of 70 A.D. was unique in the way Jews tortured murdered and despised Jews. Jerusalem was really self-destroyed. The Roman general, made every effort to spare the people, the city and the Temple, but the Jews were implacable.

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- (6) It may be that this great tribulation which began with the destruction of Judaism in 70 A.D., has continued with more or less intensity up to the present time! The Jews, since 70 A.D. have, in many lands and many centuries suffered great tribulation such as no *people* have ever known.
3. If those days had not been shortened. . . .
 - a. Titus first thought to build a seige wall and starve the Jews *all* to death, or kill every last one of them.
 - b. But then, with pressing business back in Rome, he stormed the city, killed and burned and took thousands of Jews captive.
 - c. Thus many thousands of Jews were saved alive who would have otherwise perished (Josephus, *Wars*, I:12:1).
 4. Jesus said "many will be led captive among the nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24).
 - a. Jerusalem will be desolate until God brings it to an end. But how long will that be?
 - b. The passage in Romans 11:25-26 gives the clue. Until all Israel is saved. At that time the "full number of Gentiles will have come in."
 - c. The question really focuses on the salvation of *all* Israel.
 - (1) it is plain from the New Testament that *Israel is now* the church of Jesus Christ (both Jew and Gentile).
 - (2) Rom. 9:8 ". . . it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise. . . ."
 - (3) Gal. 3:29 "and if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."
 - d. The "until" points to a time when God will have "grafted" into true spiritual Israel, all that through faith in Christ and obedience of that faith shall be saved. That is the end of time. Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles until the end of the world.
 - e. The Jews had their time. They were allotted 490 years to fulfill their messianic destiny and bring the Messiah into the world and complete God's redemptive program (Dan. 9:24-27).

They rejected their own Messiah and crucified Him. So the kingdom was taken from them and given to others (cf. Mt. 22:43).

 - (1) In this new kingdom neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but a new creation.

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- (2) *All who walk by this rule are the Israel of God* (see Gal. 6:15-16).
 - (3) God has not absolutely rejected the Jews, neither have the Jews totally rejected Christ—a hardening has taken place only in part. There are still Jews coming to God through Christ today!
 - (4) But that is the only way God will accept anyone, forevermore! (cf. Jn. 5:23; 14:6; Heb. 10:10; 10:12-14, etc.). Genetic Jewishness counts nothing with God—never did, never shall (see Rom. 2:28-29; 4:9ff.; 9:22-26; Ga. 3:6-9, etc.).
 - (5) It has always been faith that made anyone a child of God.
 - (6) Paul initiated the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).
 - (7) The time allotted for the Gentile ascendancy over Jerusalem is until the end of all time when Christ delivers up the kingdom to God (I Cor. 15:23-28).
- f. Until the end of time Jerusalem will be trodden down by Gentiles.
- (1) Geographical Jerusalem and national Israel will be characterized as Gentile so long as the present world exists.
 - (2) So long as a Jew will not come to Jehovah by faith in Jesus Christ, he is a heathen, an unbeliever, one who crucifies Christ afresh, and for him there is no possibility of repentance before God (except through Jesus) (cf. Heb. 6:1-8; 10:1-31).
5. False Christ's and false prophets showing signs and wonders, attempting to lead many astray.
- a. These pseudo-Christ's would try to convince many to follow them into different places of alleged safety.
 - b. Jesus exhorts his apostles to "take heed, I have told you all things beforehand."
 - c. He says, ". . . as the lightning . . . so will be the coming of the Son of man." What Jesus is saying here is this: "Do not follow the pseudo-Christ's; their signs will be obscure, deceitful and false. When the Son of man comes in His judgment upon this city, the signs will be unmistakable. The signs which I have told you will be as clearly visible as the lightning!"
- (1) This interpretation of the Son of man's "coming" in 24:27 is in harmony with Jesus' next statement, "Wherever

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- the body is, there the eagles (Gr. *aetoi*, "vultures") will be gathered together" 24:28.
- (2) Vultures easily ascertain where deadness is and hasten to devour it. The Romans pounced on the rotting carcass of Judaism. The Jews expected a Messiah to appear from out of nowhere and deliver them from the Romans.
 - (3) Those Jews within the besieged walls of the city were especially vulnerable to false prophets and pseudo-Christ.
 - d. Jesus said this would be a sign that Jerusalem was about to be wiped away. The real Messiah did come in 70 A.D., with *His army* (Mt. 22:7), to destroy, not deliver Jerusalem.
6. These are some of the things Josephus says went on during the fall of Jerusalem (66-70 A.D.): *Wars, Books V and VI*
- a. 3 different political parties of the Jews were within the city fighting one another for the 3 years of the siege.
 - b. They fought one another with such malice and abandon that 1000s of the innocent were slain in their "cross-fire"—even priests and worshipers in the Temple courts were slain in the very act of offering sacrifices.
 - c. These factions burned storehouses filled with food, polluted water reservoirs to keep others from having them, and thus caused the starvation of 100s of their countrymen.
 - d. Anyone who sought to escape the city, if caught by the Jews, was slain by having his throat cut.
 - e. Burial of dead bodies within the city was impossible, so they let the bodies rot, tramped over them, or threw them over the walls.
 - f. Some Jews tried to swallow their gold and escape the city, hoping to pass it after escape. Both their own countrymen and the Romans caught on to this. When such people were captured trying to escape, they were thrown to the ground and disemboweled alive and their gold taken from their intestines while they writhed in death.
 - g. Robbers plundered stores, homes, government buildings, torturing anyone found inside for food or other articles of value.
 - h. Children pulled the very morsels of food out of the mouths their aged parents, and parents did the same to their children.
 - i. Many Jews sold their homes, children, every possession for *one* handfull of wheat or barley.
 - j. One method of torture by Jews upon Jews was to drive wooden spikes up their private parts and this for no reason at all except to express anger.

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- k. Romans crucified Jews at the rate of 500 per day as they tried to escape. They ran out of wood for crosses so many were crucified.
 - l. Tens of thousands died of rampant disease and pestilence.
 - m. Some Jews leaped from the tops of the walls of Jerusalem, broke bones, mangled bodies and died. If they did survive and escape, they ate food when they could find it, so much and so rapidly they died.
 - n. Dead bodies were stacked in great heaps as high as houses.
 - o. Blood ran down the gutters and narrow streets of Jerusalem ankle deep.
 - p. Some ate from public sewers, cattle and pigeon dung, wood, leather, shields, hay, clothing, and things even scavenger animals would not.
 - q. Book VI:III:4, documents the incident of a woman roasting her own infant son and eating his flesh to stay alive (cf. Deut. 28:53).
 - r. Many false prophets told people to take refuge in the Temple, as a result 10,000 were slain and burned when Titus burned the Temple.
 - s. After the woman (mentioned above) ate the flesh of her own child, "the whole city was full of this horrid action immediately" Josephus.
 - t. Romans, upon capturing the entire city, slew every living person they encountered, "they obstructed the very streets with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree that the fire of many houses was quenched with these men's blood."
 - u. Josephus records that 1,100,000 perished and 97,000 were taken captive at this destruction of Jerusalem. Some estimates go as high as a total of 2,000,000.
 - v. Josephus concludes, ". . . thus the city was thoroughly laid even with the ground. . . ." Only three towers and a little part of one wall was left by Titus to "memorialize" his victory over the Jews.
- C. Potentates Plummeting
- 1. Matthew says, "*Immediately* after the tribulation of those days. . . . Mark says, "But *in those days, after* that tribulation. . . . Luke says, "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth, distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

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All the Synoptics say, "the powers of the heavens will be shaken. . . ."

2. The very strong indication that this text is a continuation of the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism may be seen from the following:
 - a. "Immediately" does not usually make room for much of a time gap—certainly not a gap of over 2000 years!
 - b. "When these things begin to take place . . ." in Lk. 21:28 surely is not referring to the Second Coming for there will be no signs pointing to its nearness—it will be instantaneous!
 - c. The further statement, ". . . this generation will not pass away till all these things take place" (Mt. 24:34; Lk. 21:32; Mk. 13:30) undoubtedly includes the sun and moon being darkened, stars falling from heaven, perplexity and distress of nations and the powers of the heavens being shaken.
3. This section is difficult for the Occidental (Western) mind, but not for the Oriental (Eastern). The careful Bible student will find much help in understanding this apocalyptic language of Jesus by giving attention to context and comparable passages from the Old Testament and from Biblical word usage.

This section is plainly couched in what is called "apocalyptic" language, similar to that of the Old Testament prophets and Revelation when predicting the "coming" of God in judgment upon pagan nations (or the nation of Israel). Apocalyptic language is characterized by its figurativeness, symbolism and drama.

- a. Sun, moon, and stars darkened or falling from heaven is often stated symbolically in the Old Testament to picture any inexpressible calamity such as an overturning of kingdoms or cities or kings or religious potentates thought otherwise to be invincible. It is clear that Isaiah 13:10; 14:12ff.; 24:23; 34:1-4; Jer. 4:23-28; 15:9; Joel 2:10; 2:30—3:21; Amos 8:9; Micah 3:6; Hab. 3:11, and others, refer to the fall of kingdoms and kings in such terms. This kind of imagery goes back at least as far as Joseph and his brothers (cf. Gen. 37:9ff.). They understood it then.
- b. Luke says, "distress of nations . . . in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and waves. . . ." This is picturing the distress of the wicked as these calamities of the destruction of Jerusalem roll over them like waves of the sea. Isaiah 57:20-21 uses the same symbolism. It may also refer to the overwhelming flood of the Roman army come upon Jerusalem (see Jer. 6:23ff., describing the flood of Babylonians to come upon Jerusalem in 606 B.C.).

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- c. The "powers of the heavens being shaken . . ." is apparently a figurative way of predicting the "shaking down" of the system of Judaism and the obsolete priesthood (cf. Heb. 8:13; 12:25-29; 13:13-14 with Isa. 14:12ff.; 24:21-23).
- d. Then will appear the "sign of the Son of man . . ." or as Luke puts it, "And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory." Jesus plainly told His apostles some of them would not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power and before they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Mt. 16:28). He is saying here that when the destruction of Jerusalem occurs it will be unmistakable evidence to His followers, at least, that the Son of man has "come" to keep His word about taking the kingdom from the Jews.
- e. Luke says, "men will be fainting with fear and foreboding . . ." Matthew says, "Then will all the tribes of the earth mourn." Jews had been scattered all over the world ever since the Babylonian captivity. These would certainly mourn and faint with fear when they learned of Jerusalem's obliteration by the Romans because they would fear the same treatment. This probably refers also to the prediction of Zechariah (12:10). There the Jews are predicted as mourning over the crucifying of their Messiah. John refers to this prophecy at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37). The destruction of Jerusalem was God's wrath upon the nation for crucifying ("cutting off") the Messiah (cf. Dan. 9:24-27).
- f. The Son of man coming on clouds of heaven with great power is a messianic term used by Daniel (7:13-14) in connection with Christ's first coming (*not* His second coming). This is probably what Jesus meant when He said the same thing to the High Priest warning him of the consequence of crucifying the Messiah (cf. Mt. 26:64)—the destruction of Judaism.
- g. 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 heaven to the other. Luke says it this way, "When these thing begin to take place . . . your redemption is *drawing* near." Luke does not say, ". . . your redemption is *here*" in the twinkling of an eye!
 - (1) when the fall of Judaism is accomplished, the fruitless fig tree will have been withered, and a great obstacle standing in the way of the gospel unto the whole world will be removed (cf. Mt. 21:18-22; Mk. 11:12-14; Mk. 11:20-25).

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- (2) From that time onward God will signally build up His kingdom. It shall be fully and exclusively established and recognized when the Jewish system comes to an end. This note of Luke in 21:28, “. . . now when these things begin to take place . . .” is *parallel* to his note in 21:31, “So also, when you see these things taking place . . .” and both of them refer to the *visible* destruction of Jerusalem.
- (3) Isaiah predicted that God would create a new “land” or “nation” with “one stroke . . . in one day” *before the old nation had passed away* (Isa. 66:7-9). But Isaiah also predicted that this new nation (the church) would “go forth and look on the dead bodies of the men that have rebelled against me . . .” (Isa. 66:24). These prophecies, we believe, refer to the establishment of the New Israel, the church, on the day of Pentecost—and the subsequent destruction of the old order, Judaism.

D. Readily Recognizable

1. Parable of the fig tree.

- a. Jesus was using an illustration His disciples, as outdoors men, could readily understand.
 - b. Russell Boatman says, “A budding tree, whatever its specie, is a sign that ‘spring has sprung’ and ‘summer is nigh.’ Thus He was telling His disciples that when they should see the things He had enumerated, they should know the fall of Jerusalem was at hand.”
 - c. The signs of Jerusalem’s destruction and God’s judgment of the Jewish establishment (the rulers included) will be as easily recognizable as the signs that summer is drawing near!
 - d. When they see the preliminary signs and the immediate signs they are to know that Jesus, the Son of man, is near, indeed, at the very gates of Jerusalem for judgment.
 - e. They may also know that the kingdom of God is imminently to be established exclusively in the church of Christ (Lk. 21:31).
- #### 2. Paul wrote to the Hebrew Christians to encourage them not to go back to Judaism (in Hebrews), but to hold fast to Christianity, “and so much more as they were seeing the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).
- a. What day could Jewish Christians *see approaching*?
 - b. The answer is, of course, the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism—certainly not the Second Coming of Christ.

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- c. Their “redemption” would be the breaking of the stranglehold of Judaism from the throat of the infant Church, allowing it to survive the Judaizers.
3. “This generation shall not pass away till all these things take place.”
 - a. The first thing the careful student will do is compare the same usage of the word *generation* in Mt. 16:28; Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27; Mt. 11:16; 12:41; 23:35-36.
 - b. Generation does not mean “race” as some have thought. It plainly means a life-span of some 35-40 years.
 - c. “All *these* things . . .” refers back to all the tribulations predicted from Mt. 24:4 through Mt. 24:34 (and parallels).
 - d. Notice the significant and continued use of “*these*” (contemporary things) all the way through the aforementioned sections. *But after* Mt. 24:34 (and parallels), Jesus begins using “*that*” to refer to His Second Coming when heaven and earth *is* to pass away.
4. Summarizing, it is clear that all Jesus has said or predicted in His Olivet Discourse up to this point applies strictly to the destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism. Note the following points:
 - a. “All these things . . .” indicates that *all* which He has said *prior* is said of the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - b. Up to this point in the discourse, Jesus says everything that is to happen is to happen in those *days* (plural). Everything after this point is in that *day* (singular). The phrase, “that day” (singular) is a widely used phrase in the New Testament to speak of the end of the world and the Second Coming.
 - c. The conjunction “But” in Mt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32; Lk. 21:34 is a definite word separating that which has been predicted earlier and able to be known, from that which follows the conjunction which cannot be known by signs.
- E. Transitional Statement, Mt. 24:35; Mk. 13:31; Lk. 21:33
 1. “Heaven and earth *will* pass away, but my words will not pass away. . . .”
 2. The apostles were shocked. It was if the world was coming to an end!
 3. Jesus says, “Indeed, the world *is* going to come to an end—however, the destruction of Jerusalem is *not* the end of the world.”
 4. Meanwhile the words He predicts of Jerusalem will not pass away—they will come to pass no matter how incredible they may be to Jews!

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APPREHENSION:

1. What motivated the disciples to "point out" to Jesus the buildings of the temple? Mt. 24:1
2. What is the "end" Jesus is saying "is not yet" in Mt. 24:6?
3. Could all the signs predicted by Jesus in Mt. 24:3-13 have occurred before 70 A.D.?
4. Could the gospel have been preached throughout the whole world before 70 A.D.? Mt. 24:14 (cf. Rom. 1:5, 8; 10:18; 16:26; Col. 1:6; 1:23).
5. What is the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel? Mt. 24:15 (cf. Dan. 9:24-27; Lk. 21:20).
6. Could Mt. 24:29-31 possibly refer to the fall of Jerusalem—or must it refer to the end of the world? (cf. Isa. 13:10; 14:12; 24:23; Jer. 4:23-28; 15:9).
7. What is the lesson to be learned from the fig tree? Mt. 24:32-35
8. Why did Jesus pronounce such dreadful judgment upon Jerusalem? (cf. Mt. 21:33-43; 22:1-14; 23:29-39; Deut. 18:18-19; 28:15-68).

APPLICATION:

I. HISTORY IS HEADED FOR JUDGMENT

- A. This universe in which we live is headed for a climactic holocaust.
 1. All the great catastrophic, cataclysmic events such as the downfall of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Rome and Jerusalem are not the end of history BUT THEY ARE PREDICTIONS, SIGNS OF THE INEVITABLE END OF HISTORY.
 2. Every judgment and every redemption in history typifies God's moral principles of Divine government over history. The book of Daniel and the book of Revelation are both great moving-picture scenarios, as it were, of how history predicts and prefigures God's judgments and redemptions.
 3. God has been trying to warn the world ever since the Flood that an end to history is coming.
- B. Loren Eiseley, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania comments on *mankind's indifference* to the loud lessons of history: "A yearning for a life of 'noble savagery' without the accumulated burdens of history seem in danger of engulfing a whole generation, as it did the French philosophers and their 18th century followers. Those individuals who persist in pursuing the mind-destroying drug of constant action have not only confined themselves to an increasingly chaotic present—they also, by deliberate abandonment of their past, are destroying the conceptual tools and values that are the means of introducing the rational into the oncoming future."

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1. Even today the judgments of the Almighty God march over a world that continues, for the most part, to ignore and disobey Him.
2. History, nature and the gospel revelation cry out, "Repent" but only a few choose to do so.

II. HISTORY IS HEADED FOR REDEMPTION

- A. Bertrand Russell, 97 years old, completed his autobiography. He looked back over a life that held little meaning for him and looked ahead to the specter of ultimate obliteration (he hoped). After mentioning the wish to "see the people one is fond of," he asked, "What is there to make life tolerable? We stand on the shore of an ocean, crying to the night and the emptiness; sometimes a voice answers out of the darkness. But it is the voice of one drowning; and in a moment the silence returns. The world seems to me quite dreadful; the unhappiness of many people is very great, and I often wonder how they all endure it. To know people well is to know their tragedy; it is usually the central thing about which their lives are built. And I suppose if they did not live most of the time in the things of the moment, they would not be able to go on."

Bertrand Russell is dead now. He is undoubtedly still standing on the shore of the great gulf separating Him from Christ, still crying out into the night, but hearing only the voices of those drowning.

- B. There is One who died and is Alive Forevermore. He is the One Worthy to take the scroll of history and open its seals—(Rev. 5:1ff.). He is the Lamb, victorious over, sovereign over history.

By His death and resurrection He has redeemed (purchased) history. Those who believe in Him and trust their whole life to Him will share in His redemptive consummation—He has promised this, and He kept every promise He made, even the one concerning His conquest of death!

There are those who would insist today that "authentic existence" must be discovered only in the here-and-now, not in some sweet "by and by." But in a few ticks of the clock, the present will be the past and the past is closed to everyone but God. All man has open to him is the future.

Christians look back, rightly, to that once for all event that took place in Bethlehem. He was born to die—to seek and to save. But this same Son of Man has a still unfilled purpose, and it is toward this that we should now concentrate our hope. This One who came the first time in humiliation is coming again in glory!

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The life hereafter is a subject of universal and timeless interest. This is as it should be. Man is created for eternity. God has put eternity into the mind of man (Eccl. 3:11). This present life, however significant, is only the beginning of a never-ending life of either blessedness or terror.

Life and time in this world are tentative. David, king of Israel, wrote, "Jehovah . . . let me know how frail I am . . . Surely every man is mere breath . . . He heaps up riches, and knows not who shall gather them" (Psa. 39). Statistics say that every 20 seconds a person dies in the U.S., and the death rate for the whole world is about 20 times that of the U.S. Throughout the world, a person dies every tick of the clock!

Our lesson is a series of parables from the Lord of life and time testifying to the consummation of history and final judgment. Jesus tells the world in these parables when to expect judgment, how to prepare for it, and what it will be like.

MATTHEW THE MESSIAH HAS COME AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN'S JUDGMENTS

by Paul T. Butler

Matthew 24:36—25:46

Introduction

I. APPROACH

A. Divest yourself of all presupposed theories about the Second Coming of Christ and simply let the Bible say what it's authors intended to say. There are four main rules of interpreting the Bible:

1. The true interpretation is *what the author intended to say*—not what the reader wants him to say.
2. God's word has *one intended meaning*; not many conflicting ones.
3. *God is able to say* what He wants to say, and He knows to whom He is speaking. He does not intend to confess or obscure, but to reveal.
4. The language of the Bible *is the language of man*—and is to be interpreted by the same methods and principles as are appropriate for all human language.

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- B. Expect to understand what Jesus says about His Second Coming—at least as much as He reveals.
1. Do not expect to be confused.
 2. Remember that Matthew 24 and 25 are not the only information in the Bible about Christ's Second Coming.
 3. Let me suggest that the Old Testament says *nothing* about His Second Coming. There was no point in the prophets trying to instruct the Jews on His Second Coming when they had all they could do to convince the Old Testament people of His *first* coming!
 4. Other *major portions* of scripture dealing with Christ's 2nd Coming are: (in the New Testament)
 - a. I Cor. 15:23-58 (dealing with the *fact* of the resurrection)
 - b. I Thess. 4:13—5:11 (to prove that there will be no "secret rapture" of some saints before others at the 2nd Coming).
 - c. II Thess. 2:1-12 (predicting the destruction of *the* man of sin and of *all* men of sin at Christ's 2nd Coming).
 - d. II Pet. 3:1-13 (a warning against scoffing at the doctrine of the 2nd Coming).
 - e. Revelation, chapters 20:7—22:21Of course His 2nd coming is mentioned numerous times in the New Testament but in more isolated portions.

II. APPLICATION

- A. It should be evident as we study this lesson that what Jesus is most concerned that men believe about His 2nd Coming is the application of the fact to the way they live!
- B. Application of life here is, indeed, the focus of all the New Testament says about the 2nd Coming.
The focus is certainly *not* on time tables or battlefields or the destiny of the Jews or the land of Palestine.
- C. "It is not for you to know times or seasons . . . you shall be my witnesses." (Acts 1:7)
- D. ". . . he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day . . . and has given assurance to all men . . ." (Acts 17:30-31).
- E. ". . . comfort one another with these words . . ." (I Thess. 4:18).
- F. "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness . . ." (II Pet. 3:11ff.).

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Discussion

I. WAIT, 24:36—25:46

A. It is futile, at best, and apparently *contrary* to the will of Christ to try to determine when the Lord is coming again for redemption and judgment.

1. No one knows when the *consummation* of the age is to arrive in time.

a. Jesus Himself said: "But of *that* day and hour *no one knows*, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" 24:36.

b. Jesus reiterates this emphatically throughout our lesson—note:

Mt. 24:36 ". . . of that day and hour, no one knows . . ."

Mt. 24:37-39 ". . . as in the days of Noah . . . they did not know . . ."

Mt. 24:42 ". . . watch . . . for you do not know . . ."

Mk. 13:35 ". . . watch . . . for you do not know . . ."

Mt. 24:44 ". . . at an hour you do not expect . . ."

Mt. 24:51 ". . . when not expected . . . when not known . . ."

Mt. 25:13 ". . . you know neither the day nor the hour . . ."

Mt. 25:19 ". . . after a long time . . ."

Mt. 25:31 ". . . when(?) the son of man comes . . ."

c. The rest of the New Testament emphatically teaches that no one will know when Christ returns.

The New Testament emphasizes His return will be "like a thief in the night" I Thess 5:1-4; II Pet. 3:10 (see also II Thess. 2:1-2).

2. To explain Jesus' emphatic statements by saying that Jesus simply did not know the year, or the day of the month, or the exact minute when He would return, but that He *did* tell us certain signs to look for and then know that it is *near*, makes this whole context ridiculous!

3. Jesus did not even know any signs to reveal about His 2nd Coming—none are told!

4. If Jesus knew the time of His 2nd Coming but, as He did, declared He would not tell it (or could not), the temptation to read into His every statement some subtle prediction as to the time would consume the energies of all Christendom.

That is why Jesus was so emphatic to say, "*No one knows! Not even I!*"

5. There is no excuse for anyone trying to predict the time of His

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return when we understand that even Jesus Himself did not know!

- B. The most important thing about eschatology is its emphasis on the certainty of the end of this world and judgment.
1. Jesus and the apostles always spoke of His return in terms, not of time, but of results—judgment and redemption.
 2. He is coming back—the world can believe that. The world had better believe that! His return is as certain as His resurrection.
 3. We do not need to know when or how—we do not even need to know what kind of body we shall have (I Cor. 15, etc.).
 4. WHAT WE NEED IS TO TRUST HIM, WORK FOR HIM, WAIT FOR HIM AND WELCOME HIM.
 5. It is the work of the devil to divert our attention from the real focus of His return by getting us to be curious about “times and seasons.”
- C. There will be no abnormal, extra-ordinary “signs” pointing to a definite time for His return, Mt. 24:37-42.
1. It (Christ’s *parousia*) will be just like the coming of the Flood in Noah’s day.
 2. Life going on in its *normal* path; marrying, building, eating and drinking—business as usual—**SUDDENLY THE END.**
 3. Those of Noah’s day “did not know until the flood came” (24:39)—the *only warning they had was the faithful preaching of Noah. THERE WERE NO PRELIMINARY SIGNS!*
 4. Two women will be grinding at the mill—one is taken, one is left.
 - a. This has nothing to do with a “secret rapture”
 - b. Its emphasis, in the context, is to focus on the unexpectedness of Christ’s 2nd coming.
 - c. Especially does it emphasize the need to be ready every moment, even when working in the field, or at the time of household duties, for no one knows when He is coming. He will come when people are going about their *daily business*—and most of the world will not be prepared, because they are not being alert at every moment!
 5. Luke’s parallel to this is in Lk. 21:34-36
 - a. Jesus said there, men and women who believe Him need to guard against being weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness (Gr. *kraipale*, lit. “headache, hangover, stupor” is translated dissipation); (Gr. *methe*, from which we get methanol, methane, etc., is translated, drunkenness). When

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Jesus returns, a large portion of the world will be in a stupor from revelry.

- b. Believers also need to guard against being weighed down with the cares of this life.

(Gr. *merimnais*, lit. "divided mind" or "anxiety"—it is the same word as used in Mt. 6, "Be not anxious")

Many will be so divided in their loyalty, they will not be ready to leave this world behind when Jesus comes.

Remember Lot's wife! (Lk. 17:32)

- c. The day of Christ's return will come *suddenly like a snare*, upon all who dwell upon the face of *the whole earth*, at the same time!

d. That day is going to "spring shut," suddenly, like a snare.

- D. Christ will no more make a prior announcement about His return than a thief would who comes in the night to rob a house, Mt. 24:43-44.

1. The thief depends totally on the element of *surprise*.

2. Jesus is going to *surprise* the world (I Thess. 5:1-11).

3. There is absolutely no way to know ahead of time when the Lord is coming, if He says it is going to be a surprise! (II Pet. 3:10).

4. Jesus said this more than once (cf. Lk. 12:35-40). Jesus does not want the world to know *when* He is going to return.

5. He could not be any clearer than when He said, ". . . the Son of man is coming *at an hour you do not expect.*"

And this is said even to those who are His disciples, to those who believe Him and study His Word and know it.

How then can people expect to find in His Word any indication of the *time* of His return?

- E. After His "journey" from this earth back to heaven, the long passage of time before His return may make it appear He has "delayed" His return, but just when some may have thought that, He will return. Mt. 24:45-51.

1. In other words, the Lord has *purposely delayed* His return.

2. That does not mean, however, that it could not be at any moment.

3. He has delayed it in order to sift the true and faithful believers from those who are not.

The true and faithful will not be lulled into unfaithfulness by the delay. They will believe Him when He says, "expect Me *at every moment,*" don't think you can indulge yourselves for a while and then hope to anticipate My return by certain signs, ahead of time!

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4. This is what the “wicked servant” hoped for—he expected a signal or a prior announcement from his Master that he was about to return. He would then leave off self-indulgence and get ready for the return.
 5. The wicked servant fooled himself by speculating about the time of the Master’s return when the Master had said nothing at all about the time of His return!
Such speculation is debilitating to the church and dangerous (I and II Thess.)!
- F. Five of the ten virgins thought they knew the Bridegroom’s schedule for coming—they believed they could anticipate it, Mt. 25:1-13.
1. They were not ungodly or immoral or hypocritical . . . they just knew He would not come unexpectedly.
 2. It never entered their minds that He might tarry.
 3. In spite of the emphatic insistence of this parable: “. . . you know neither the day nor the hour . . .” (25:13), men still assume they can know, or men still assume He is not coming back at all.
 4. Jesus calls these 5 virgins, “*morons*” (that is the Greek word used, *morai*, in 25:2).
 5. It is *moronic* for anyone to think he can know the Bridegroom’s day or hour of return!
- G. The Lord will return at any moment—He is coming back when men will be going about the normal, everyday affairs of life, Mt. 25:14-46.
1. Some people will be putting their talents to work, others will not.
 2. Some people will be feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers, visiting the sick and the imprisoned—others will not.
 3. There is no indication that any great holocaust will be going on world-wide when He returns.
 4. There is no indication that evil will be any worse than it is at any other time.
 5. There is no indication that there will be some “one-world government” being led by some individual known as *the* “anti-christ.” (John says there will always be *many* anti-christs—those who do not pay heed to the apostolic message are anti-christs)—see I Jn.
 6. Mk. 13:31 uses Gr. word *kairos*, “time” generic—the time will be unknowable.

MATTHEW, CHAPTERS 24 THROUGH 25

II. WORK, Mt. 24:36—25:46

A. Watch

1. Every parable in this lesson exhorts *watchfulness*
2. In view of the certainty of the return of Christ for judgment and redemption—and in view of the certainty that no one knows when it will be—the proper preparation for it is to be constantly *working*, for the Lord.
3. Working is equated with *watching*.
4. The Greek word translated watch is *gregoreite* (it is the word from which the English name, *Gregory*, originates)
It means, “be awake, be vigilant, be alert.” It means *constant* vigilance.
5. The only person a thief cannot surprise is the one who stays awake all the time—never goes to sleep.

B. All must watch, not just some, Mk. 13:32-37.

1. When the “man” went away on his journey and left his servants in charge, *he left each servant with his work*.
2. It is not just a few in mankind who are to be alert, vigilant, expecting Him to return at every moment, it is everyone.
3. God will hold *all men responsible* to be doing His “work” when He comes back.

C. Do not let the “Householder’s” “house” be broken into!, Mt. 24:43-44.

1. The whole world is God’s house, all creation belongs to Him.
2. Men should stay alert and vigilant and not let Satan invade what belongs to God.
3. At least Christians, who know that the Master can or should be expected at any moment, will be alert and watchful and faithful constantly. When He returns He will find His house (the church) not invaded by the thief.

D. Serve faithfully, correctly and constantly in the Master’s household, Mt. 24:45-51.

1. The wise servant

- a. Does his job the best he knows to do it. Feeds the household.
- b. Does so at the proper time. He does not speculate about the time of the Master’s return, but is faithful **ONE DAY AT A TIME!**
- c. When the Master finally comes back, the wise servant is found doing his job (*which is not to try to speculate* when the Master is going to return).
- d. Watching for the Master’s return consists in faithful *service*.

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2. The wicked servant
 - a. Depends on his own judgment and speculates on the time of the Master's return when the Master has not even told the servant when He shall return!
 - b. He is really unfaithful and disloyal in his heart and waits until he figures the Master isn't coming back to act upon his disloyal attitudes.
 - c. He is a criminal at heart. He thinks of God as a policeman. He is "good" only when the Master is present.
 - d. He is self-deluded through his own speculations, he scoffs at the need for faithfulness, and begins to exploit his fellow servants for his own selfish purposes.
 - e. Speculating about *any* time of Christ's return is disobedient.
- E. Gain wisdom, prepare, *fill your lamp!* Mt. 25:1-13
 1. Christians are "lamps" or lights to the world.
 2. Men cannot neglect to prepare, to fill their lamps, and be ready for the Bridegroom's return.
 3. How does one "fill his lamp"? Worship, study, read the Bible, pray, give, light the way for others.
 4. The key word is WATCH. This does not mean constant gazing into the sky (see II Thess. 2:1-2) or being deluded to the effect that the day of the Lord has come so that you leave off working for your living (see II Thess. 3:6-15), and withdraw into some commune or sect out in the wilderness.
 5. It *does* mean having some forethought for the future. It *does* mean to make spiritual preparation and continue to do so.
 6. One of the most inescapable lessons of life is the necessity of being prepared. Practically everything we do requires preparation. Hardly anything can be done at the last moment!

The time of examination is not the time of preparation. No course of study can be mastered on the last night!

No one can wait until the night before an extended journey and expect to make *adequate* preparations.Death and judgment are inevitable, yet millions go blithely on without preparing to face the Judge!
 7. We cannot borrow what must be purchased.
 - a. Why didn't the wise give to the foolish (moronic)? Because there are some things which cannot be loaned or given to another.
 - b. Character, obedience, preparation, desire, goals—these cannot be loaned or given to another.

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- c. Character is something that must be developed by each individual—it cannot be loaned.
- d. We cannot borrow obedience, foresight, goals or character from someone else.

“Save yourselves . . .” Acts 2:40; “Work out your own salvation . . .” Phil. 2:12.

- 8. We cannot recall lost opportunities.
 - a. These maidens missed their one chance. They did not seize their one great opportunity!
 - b. Every day brings us opportunities that we must not neglect—that may be the very day the Bridegroom returns!
Today we have open doors. If we fail to go through those doors they will shut—shut us out from the joy of serving.
 - c. The pathos of this parable is that the foolish girls failed. It wasn’t that the groom didn’t want them to enjoy his feast—they just failed to prepare themselves for it.
 - d. Do that good deed today. There is always one there to be done—every day—you don’t have to go to sleep and wait for one to come. PUT OIL IN YOUR LAMP TODAY!

- 9. If we are consumed with the question, “*When* will the Bridegroom return” we are consumed with the *wrong* question. The moment we dwell on when, we are in trouble.

- a. The real question is: “Does my lamp have oil in it—*now!* Is it lighting up *now!*”
- b. If the door is shut to us to the Bridegroom’s feast, it will be because of something *we* have left undone!
- c. The Bridegroom will be eagerly expecting, and ready for us—He is not willing that any have no oil in their lamps. The momentous question is: Are we ready?
- d. The foolish and unprepared when He comes cannot pin the blame on Him or on those who have prepared!

The point of this parable is that the foolish are in no position to accept what the Bridegroom has to offer; they are completely unprepared, and when He comes it is too late.

- e. The groom does not wish to exclude them. They are simply unprepared to receive Him.

- F. Put your talents to work, whatever they are, however many or few, trusting in *His* graciousness, Mt. 25:14-30.

- 1. All men are endowed differently in God’s world.
- 2. God will not demand all men produce the same. Each man will be matched against his endowed abilities and opportunities.

THIRTEEN LESSONS ON REVELATION

3. Every servant must produce according to what he has—not according to what he does not have!
4. This parable clearly teaches that watchfulness does not mean idleness.
5. Each servant receives something. Not a single servant is passed over.
6. Each did not receive the same. Each was given an amount in keeping with what the Master deemed fitting.
7. In the parable, those who received the five and the two, went immediately to work. Their success did not come without effort on their part. They may have been tempted to waste or to keep safe, but they didn't—they gained because they labored.
Do not forget, however, they could have gained nothing if the Master had not given them everything they had to start with!
8. The one who received only one failed.

- a. Perhaps he was ashamed that he only had one talent. Not wanting to do what appeared the least—he did nothing. Some are like that. If they can't do the largest, they won't do anything.
- b. Perhaps he did not have the courage to work. If a man is not willing to pay the price of hard labor in service to the Master, he will produce nothing.
- c. *Most important, he did not trust his Master.* He believed he would get a dishonest deal from his Master. Some people look upon God this way.

Such a view of God is what satisfies the productivity of many servants. God does not simply "order and demand." He loves and pities and extends his grace and mercy. God is not only just, fair and honest, He is gracious. He gives the means, the motive and the power to do it—*and then rewards us for doing it!*

9. COULD IT BE THAT WE DON'T DO WHAT LITTLE WE CAN FOR THE LORD, BECAUSE WE DON'T TRUST THE LORD TO BE FAIR AND GRACIOUS IN HIS JUDGMENTS?

COULD IT BE THAT WE THINK THE LORD EXPECTS SOMETHING "BIG" AND "SPECTACULAR" OUT OF EVERYBODY, AND SINCE WE CAN'T DO THAT, WE WON'T DO ANYTHING?

LOOK AT THE NEXT PARABLE!

- G. *Give* what you have; help those in need (which is everyone in some area or another—either in physical or spiritual need)—for helping people is serving Christ, Mt. 25:31-46.

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1. This parable pictures all of humanity facing a final, irreversible judgment. It is more than a parable, it is a realistic prophecy.
2. Jesus makes this prophecy the criterion or standard of judgment because such conduct is the final proof as to whether a person is really His disciple or not (see Jn. 13:35).
3. On the judgment day it will be a question of how well our deepest feelings and our mouthed professions have been expressed by our positive actions toward others (cf. James 1:22-27; 2:1-26; I Jn. 4:17-21).
4. Jesus puts the principle of "working for Him," or "giving" within the reach of *everyone* of His disciples.
 - a. Things done or given here were simply things, helpful things, everyone can do.
 - b. Too often we feel that what we can do is too little—so we do nothing at all.
 - c. Yet what the "righteous servants" did in this account is what everyone of us could do.
 - d. How important is *one* act of unexpected kindness—one word of comfort or "good news" to a man who does not have it? ONLY ETERNITY CAN TELL!
 - e. Every cup of cold water in His name will be considered faithful service by the Master.
5. Note that those who had done these simple things of goodness and mercy were absolutely *unaware* of their importance.
 - a. They had done these things without being coerced, without being solicited, and without expecting any reward.
 - b. Their kindnesses were spontaneous.
 - c. Most remarkable, they did not realize they had really been giving to Christ all along.
 - d. They were startled to learn they had actually *ministered to Christ*.
 - e. Every good deed from an unselfish motive is a ministry to God.
6. This prophecy poses a situation every person needs to contemplate:
 - a. Suppose Christ were on earth today—what would be my attitude toward Him?
 - b. Of course Christ is not here in flesh and blood—but His brothers are.
 - c. Whatever we do for them, we do for Him. God is a father, all men are His children. Can we do good to God without doing good to His children? Love me, love my children. Love my children and you love me.

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- d. Although this parable by itself does not mean that benevolence alone is sufficient to save a person—yet lack of benevolence is sufficient to condemn a person as unworthy of Christ.

III. WELCOME, Mt. 24:36—25:46

- A. Christians should look forward with eagerness to the return of Christ and judgment of the world.
 1. Paul told the Thessalonians to “comfort” one another with the hope of His 2nd coming (I Thess. 4:18).
 2. Peter said we will “rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed” (I Pet. 4:13).
 3. Peter said we should be “waiting for and earnestly desiring” the coming day of God (II Pet. 3:12).
- B. Our lesson in these verses here tells us why the Christian should earnestly desire His return:
 1. There will be the *separation* promised by God of all those who want Him and His righteousness, from all the wicked who have manifested by their evil that they do not want Him and His Way.
 - a. Men in the fields and women at the grindstones who have not been faithful to His Word and His Way, and have not “watched” will be left to destruction.
 - b. Those who have concentrated on getting and keeping what God has declared is doomed, carnality, will be doomed along with it.
 - c. Those who have faithfully served and kept God’s house in order will not have to go on dwelling with those who have mocked God and exploited His servants.
 - d. Those who have faithfully, and at sacrifice of self-indulgence, kept their lamps filled, will not have to endure the carelessness and disrespect of others for the Groom any longer.
 - e. Those who trusted their Master and put their talents to use will no longer suffer the mockery of those who mistrusted the Master and were contemptuous of Him.
 - f. Those who want to be helpful and kind and loving will no longer have to live with those who hinder and hate helpfulness, kindness and love.
 2. *Dominion* will be given to faithful servants, fellowship, sharing with God in reigning over His new heaven and new earth.
 - a. Because they have proved their faithfulness to have such dominion great and eternal things by being faithful over the little and temporal things.

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- b. He will set the faithful over all his possessions (Mt. 24:47).
 - c. He will set the faithful over much (Mt. 25:21, 23),
 - d. He will even give the faithful more than he deserves—the faithful will be given what would have been given to the unfaithful.
 - e. The faithful will inherit the kingdom which God Himself has prepared (Mt. 25:34).
3. *Festive joy* in the presence of the Bridegroom will be the reward of the faithful, (Mt. 25:10, 21).
- a. A crown of glory will be given the faithful, II Tim. 4:8; I Pet. 5:4.
 - b. Whatever the judgment will be, there is no human experience with which to compare it.
God is preparing for those who love Him an eternal weight of glory *beyond all comparison!* (II Cor. 4:17).
 - c. Since He gave us His Son, He is also going to give us *all things* (Rom. 8:32)!
 - d. Whatever Christ inherited from the Father for His faithfulness, the Father will give us also, for we are fellow heirs with Him provided we suffer with Him (Rom. 8:15-17).
- C. Paul's conclusion to his great dissertation on the certainty of the resurrection and judgment is the Christian's comfort:
"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" I Cor. 15:58.

APPREHENSION:

1. Why did Jesus not know when heaven and earth would pass away? Mt. 24:36
2. In what way is the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world to be like the days of Noah? Mt. 24:37-42
3. Here, you should read, Mark 13:34-37: *What* is the "work" the "master" left for *each* of his servants? Are you doing yours? Mk. 13:34-37
4. What would be "an hour men do *not* expect" the Lord to return? Mt. 24:44 When does a thief break into a house? Would Jesus slip up on the world?
5. Who is the "faithful and wise" servant? Mt. 24:45-51
6. There were five wise virgins—how were the other five characterized? Mt. 25:1-13 Do you know any like the latter five? Have you spoken to them?

THIRTEEN LESSONS ON REVELATION

7. If the "virgins" parable teaches constant alertness, what does the "talents" parable teach? Mt. 25:14-30
8. What does the last parable, Mt. 25:31-46, tell you about preparing for judgment?

APPLICATION:

Police court annals tell the story of a young man who registered at one of the leading hotels in N.Y. shortly after the turn of the century. He wrote down one of the most famous names in the U.S. and the hotel clerk was very deferential to him. He had an air of being "to the manner born." When packages began to arrive from several large furnishing houses and jewelry stores, the hotel received them and paid the accounts. After a few days the time for settling came. The young man brushed them off with excuses, which aroused the suspicion of the local hotel management. They notified the police and a quiet investigation revealed the startling fact that the famous man whose name the young man had written on the register with "junior" after it, did not even have a son. The young man, confronted by the authorities, put on an air of bravado; he blustered that there was some mistake. Finally, it became necessary to take him down to Wall Street to the office of the well known millionaire. The man walked into the room and looked at the boy and said, "I never laid eyes on this young man before in all my life." That sealed the doom of the imposter.

Multitudes of people who claim that God is their Father are just as guilty as was this young man. In order to address the Creator as Father, an individual must have accepted the truth which makes this relationship possible.

On the great judgment day, there will be a separation, made by the omniscient Christ. Those who love Him, want Him and are willing to surrender to Him, will be permitted to do so without any hindrance—to their highest potentialities. Those who wish to be rid of every vestige of God's presence and dominion shall be granted their wish. Those who wish to be alone with themselves in their rebellion will be allowed to do so. Those who desire falsehood, dirtiness, perverseness shall be surrounded by it! That is how God treated Israel with their mania for idolatry—He sent them into heathen captivity! That is how John says God will treat men at the final reckoning—"let the filthy still be filthy" (Rev. 22:11).

**WHAT YOU REALLY WANT HERE IS WHAT YOU WILL WANT THERE!
WHAT YOU REALLY ARE HERE IS WHAT YOU WILL BE THERE! THAT IS
THE WAY GOD HAS ORDERED IT TO BE!**