

# Olivet Discourse Rapture

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## For Discussion:

### **Is the Rapture of the Church in Matthew 24?**

(David Bartholomew, Prophecy Watcher, Dec, 2024)

I have gone back and forth regarding whether the rapture is mentioned in the Olivet Discourse initially believing it was but later being influenced by biblical scholars who said it couldn't be. This deep dive study constitutes the result of my wrestling with that confusion to clarify my conclusion that Jesus did indeed have the church very much in mind when He delivered the Olivet Discourse.

### **Is Matthew 24:40-41 about the rapture of the church?**

Matthew 24:40-41 – *Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.*

It sure sounds like it despite biblical scholars like Andy Woods & JB Hixson who insist that the Olivet Discourse is primarily a message to Israel during the Tribulation.

- Indeed, the book of Matthew is said to have been written originally for the Jews presenting Christ as the Son of David.

### **What is the problem with seeing the rapture in Matthew 24:40-41?**

The parallel passage in Luke 17:34-37 where the disciples asked Jesus...

Luke 17:37 – *And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?" So He said to them, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."*

This sounds like those taken are taken in judgment, not rescued from God's wrath.

### **If those taken in Matthew 24:40-41 suffer God's judgment, what happens to those who are left?**

They are the Tribulation saints who survive the 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Daniel and will repopulate the earth during the Millennial Kingdom.

### **Why is Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse separated into chapters 17 and 21?**

The main part of Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse is in Luke 21 and Luke 17 is separated from it.

- It seems like the portion in Luke 17 is where it is because Jesus pointed out the time was coming when He would not be with them and God's judgment would precede His return.

### **So, how do we deal with Luke 17 sounding like the one taken is taken into judgment?**

Jesus didn't directly answer the questions of the disciples here, He responded with what their take away should be: that judgment would follow the taking away of people.

- The reference to the body and eagles is a proverb meaning that moral corruption demands divine judgment.

### **Where else do we see this proverb meaning that moral corruption demands divine judgment?**

It is also in Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse which gives more details...

Matthew 24:27-28 – *For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.*

Here, this proverb is used in conjunction with what is clearly the Second Coming of Christ to earth at the end of the Tribulation. This idea is reinforced in Revelation immediately following the triumphant return of the *King of kings and Lord of lords*...

Revelation 19:17-18 – *Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great."*

And this idea was also clear from the prophets...

Ezekiel 39:17-20 – *thus says the Lord God, Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field: "Assemble yourselves and come; Gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you, a great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, drink the blood of the princes of the earth... You shall be filled at My table with horses and riders, with mighty men and with all the men of war" (see also Is 18:6, Ezek 39:4, Zeph 1:7)*

## Why didn't Jesus directly answer the disciples regarding the ones taken in Luke 17?

Answering that question wasn't as important as what He wanted them to take away from the discussion: God's judgment was coming following the taking away.

## What other times did Jesus not directly answer the question of people?

The questions asked that launched Him into the Olivet Discourse...

Matthew 24:3 – *Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"*

Jesus had just told His disciples about the coming destruction of the temple which would happen about 40 years later. But He didn't answer their question about when that would happen. Instead, He focused on the more important questions of the signs of His return and the end of the Church Age.

Nicodemus came to Jesus to confirm that He was the one who would usher in the promised Messianic Kingdom but Jesus launched into what was more important for all people to understand:

John 3:3 – *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*

In John 4, the Samaritan woman at the well asked Jesus for the living water He spoke about causing Jesus to instead reveal that He knew her better than just some random Jewish traveler (her 5 husbands). This led to Him telling her He was the Messiah.

## How does the immediate context of Matthew 24:40-41 re-enforce the idea this is a reference to the rapture?

### Matthew 24:36-44

<sup>36</sup> *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. <sup>37</sup> But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>38</sup> For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>42</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

**No one knows the *day or hour*** – the rapture of the church is not tied to any signs... it could happen at any time: this is the Doctrine of Imminence

**Days of Noah & Lot** – The rescue of Noah, Lot, and their families occurred before God's judgment at a time when people generally were not expecting it; they were oblivious to their coming doom and carrying on life as usual.

**His coming would be like a thief** – Jesus returns to take away His bride, the church, depriving the world of those who know Him. It will be more of a loss than they admit.

## How is it Matthew 24:36-44 cannot be referring to the Second Coming of Christ?

- **No one knows the *day or hour*** – the schedule for the Second Coming is well established even giving the number of days from the Abomination of Desolation.
  - Tribulation saints will be able to mark the Day Jesus returns on their calendar.
- **Days of Noah & Lot** – The end of the Tribulation will hardly be life as usual... malignant sores, no drinkable water, great heat, darkness, pain, and a world-wide earthquake that levels all the mountains (oh, and 100-pound hailstones) ... no one will be getting married!
- **His coming would be like a thief** – A thief comes secretly and unexpectedly; the Second Coming will hardly be either secretly or unexpectedly... The whole world will see Him.

## What else gives us the idea that Jesus is giving a direct message to the church in Matthew 24:36-44?

- The **language** used here sounds exactly like the image Paul revealed to describe the rapture of the church: *taken and left*.
- The **broader context** is the signs of His coming... the rapture would certainly be a huge supernatural sign for Israel and Tribulation saints.
- The disciples constituted the **foundation** of the church... they needed to know details about the blessed hope of the church.
- Jesus knew **Israel would reject Him** as Messiah and He had moved on preparing His disciples to lead the church.

## How does seeing the rapture in Matthew 24:36-44 re-enforce the doctrine of the Pre-Trib Rapture?

The analogies offered up, days of Noah and Lot, have God's faithful being rescued **before** He pours out His judgment.

- Noah and his family were *lifted up high above the earth* in an ark (Genesis 7:17); Lot and his family *escaped up to the mountains* (Genesis 19:17)

### **At what point did Jesus shift from exclusively ministering to the Jews to bring Gentiles into the fold?**

We see this in the sending out of the 12 disciples...

Matthew 10:5-7 – *Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’*

The Kingdom was offered to Israel because the King was in their midst. But the leaders of the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah...

Matthew 12:23-24 – *all the multitudes were amazed and said, “Could this be the Son of David?” Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.”*

Jesus responded to their unbelief by pointing out the Jewish religious leaders were committing the Unpardonable Sin.

- In Matthew 13, Jesus begins preparing His disciples for ministering to the coming Jewish/Gentile church with the 7 parables of the Spiritual Kingdom of God.

### **Why wasn’t Jesus more explicit in revealing the rapture in the Olivet Discourse rather than just allude to it?**

Not all the disciples were present for the Olivet Discourse, only Peter, James, John and Andrew per Mark 13:3 (His first 4 disciples and 2 sets of brothers).

- Matthew, Mark and Luke who recorded the Olivet Discourse would have gotten what they knew 2<sup>nd</sup>-hand (probably from Peter... but inspired by the Holy Spirit) Jesus did give direct reference to the rapture just hours later in the Upper Room at the Last Supper with all the disciples present...

John 14:1-3 – *Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

### **What does Luke contribute to the idea that the rapture is in the Olivet Discourse?**

Luke 21:28 – *Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.*

The concept of redemption is New Covenant language... intended for the Church Age and following.

- *when these things begin to happen* – the rapture will occur when we see the birth pangs; not after but when they begin!

Luke 21:36 – *Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*

Jew and Gentile Tribulation saints will not be escaping *all these things that will come to pass*, they will be going through it!

- Only Church Age saints will escape the Tribulation.

### **How may people be counted worthy to escape *all these things that will come to pass* (Tribulation)?**

That can only apply to Church-Age saints by being born again to believe that Jesus is their Savior.

### **How does knowing that Jesus had the church in mind for the Olivet Discourse shed new light on it?**

Certainly, on what follows the allusion to the rapture:

- **The Faithful & Evil Servant (Matt 24:45-51)** – Scoffers are not faithful servants and are in danger of suffering the fate of hypocrites (mere professing Christians)
- **Wise & Foolish Virgins (Matt 25:1-13)** – While both true & professing Christians both are asleep (not watching), the true Christians will go to the wedding supper since they are ready with the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- **Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30)** – The faithful will be rewarded for applying what God has gifted them with. Those who hide their gifts are not saved.
- **Sheep & Goat Judgment (Matt 25:31-46)** – The *least of these* are both Jews and Gentiles who embrace Jesus as Savior during the Tribulation (not a case for socialist government).

### **What applications do we see from this discussion?**

- The Olivet Discourse is best understood when harmonized between Matthew, Mark & Luke.
- Jesus had the church in mind when He delivered the Olivet Discourse; this sheds new light on it!