

The Prophetic Scope of Matthew 24

by A.W. Pink

Matthew 24 describes the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming of Christ, emphasizing the importance of understanding the prophetic scope of this chapter.

Scripture: Matthew 24:1

Topics: "Prophecy", "The End Times"

Description

A.W. Pink explores the prophetic discourse of Christ in Matthew 24, delivered shortly before His crucifixion, emphasizing its significance for the Jewish nation and the future events surrounding the end of the age. He highlights the disciples' questions regarding the destruction of the Temple and the signs of Christ's coming, clarifying that these prophecies are primarily directed towards Israel and not the Church. Pink contrasts the accounts in Matthew and Luke, noting the unique aspects of Matthew's narrative that focus on the Jewish context and the impending tribulation. He underscores the importance of understanding the 'abomination of desolation' and the great tribulation that will precede the establishment of a new age for Israel. Ultimately, Pink encourages believers to focus on the hope of Christ's return rather than the signs of the times.

Transcript

The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13

Chapter 9:

THE PROPHETIC SCOPE OF MATTHEW 24.

The prophetic discourse of Christ found in Matthew 24 and 25 was delivered by Him in private to a few of His disciples less than a week before the Crucifixion. He had left the Temple for the last time. His public ministry was completed. He had announced to the leaders of the nation that, "your house is left unto you desolate," and had declared, "You shall not see Me henceforth, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord." As Christ left the Temple, accompanied by His disciples, they, no doubt, awed and puzzled by what He had just said, directed His attention to the magnificent buildings of the Temple, particularly to the massive stones of which they were constructed, saying, "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" (Mark 13:1 and compare John 2:20).

To which He responded, "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). Then, as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, in full sight of the City and Temple, the disciples asked, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3). Each of the first three Gospels supply us with an inspired account of our Lord's prophetic discourse, but it is only by diligently comparing them and noting their differences that we can discover the scope and design of each, for there is no mere repetition in Scripture.

Luke's account differs from Matthew's and Mark's in two important respects--what is related and what is omitted. Matthew's account is based upon a threefold question, see Matthew 24:3; whereas Luke's is based upon a twofold question, see Luke 21:7. It is most important that the student should carefully note the omission of any reference to Christ's "coming" in Luke's account. The second main difference is connected with the time for "fleeing". In Matthew 24:15, 16 we read, "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand), then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains."

Whereas in Luke 21:20, 21 we read. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains." That part of our Lord's prophetic discourse recorded in Luke 21 (to the middle of v. 24) was all fulfilled by the year A.D. 70. First, Jerusalem was invested by Cestius Gallus, who was repulsed. Later, it was attacked by Titus, the emperor's son, who was successful. But between the two besiegements, there is good reason to believe that, all Christians "fled," and that none of them perished in Jerusalem.

Luke's "sign" is past, Matthew's is yet future. It is most important to observe that in Matthew 24 no reference is made to the destruction of Jerusalem after verse 2; while, on the other hand, in Luke 21 no reference at all is made to "the abomination of desolation." Now the first thing to do in taking up the study of Matthew 24 is to pay careful attention to its context, namely chapter 23. There, a sevenfold "woe" is uttered, and solemn sentence of doom is pronounced by the Lord Jesus upon the apostate nation of Israel.

This is found in verses 34-38, closing with those fearful words, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Then the Lord added, "For I say unto you, you shall not see Me henceforth, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (v. 39). This last verse is most important. The "coming" of Christ which is there referred to is not His descent into the air to catch up the Church, but His return to the earth unto the people of Israel. It is this which supplies the key to Matthew 24:3, and shows that everything in Matthew 24 is yet future and is wholly Jewish.

"And Jesus went out, and departed from the Temple" (v 1). Mark the first word of this verse: the "and" denotes that what follows gives a continuation, without any break, of that which is recorded in the closing verses of chapter 23. It supplies a solemn confirmation of what was there announced: "Your house is left unto you desolate" is verified by the words "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple." "And His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple.

And Jesus said unto them, see ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (vv. 1, 2). This foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, or more specifically, the razing of the Temple. It is most important to observe that this was said before the prophetic discourse of Christ's which is recorded in Matthew 24:4 and onwards. "And as He sat

upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be?" (v. 3).

That this question was asked separately from "And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" or "age," shows plainly that the "when shall these things be?" referred specifically to the overthrow of the Temple, which implied the destruction of the City. It is to be noted that only Luke records Christ's answer to that question, see Luke 21:20-24. This part of our Lord's prediction Matthew was guided to omit. "And what shall be the sign of Thy coming?" (v. 3).

What did the disciples have in mind when they asked this question? Surely there cannot be the slightest difficulty for us now to discover the true answer. So far as the inspired records go, up to this point the Lord had said nothing whatever to His disciples about His going to the Father's house to prepare a place for His people, and of His coming again to receive them "unto Himself." No hint whatever had been given of His future descent into the air for the purpose of removing His saints from this earth.

Therefore this aspect of the Lord's "coming" could not have been in the mind of the disciples at that time. It should be obvious to every honest heart and impartial mind that when they asked, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?" they had before them what He had just said to the nation of Israel, namely, "You shall not see Me henceforth, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 21:9); which was His coming back to the earth. One other thing enables us to fix the meaning of this question of the disciples, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?"

No "signs" are now given to or for those whose calling is a heavenly one. How could there be, when of them it is written, "we walk by faith, not by sight"? (2 Cor. 5:7). God's people today are not to be looking for "signs," but listening for a sound, namely, the "shout" of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16)! "And of the end of the age?" To what "age" did the disciples refer? Surely there can be only one answer: that associated with Christ's "coming" to the earth itself. It should be carefully borne in mind that this question was asked by the disciples, as Jews, before the Cross, before the Christian dispensation began.

It is of the greatest importance that this fact should be kept before us, for a mistake on that point necessarily involves an erroneous interpretation of what follows. If we remember that at this time the apostles had no thought of (or, at any rate, no real belief in) Christ's death and resurrection, it should help us to see that the Christian "age" could not have been in their minds. They were Jews, in spirit, hopes, expectations--the very first verse of Matthew 24 (following right after Matthew 23:38) more than hints at that.

It is failure at this very point which has led so many to imagine that Matthew 24 teaches that "the Church" will pass through the great Tribulation. It is to be carefully observed that in His answer the Lord referred the disciples to Daniel: "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place" (v. 15). It is interesting to note that the expressions "the end" or "time of the end" occur in Daniel just thirteen times, and that they are found nowhere else in the Old Testament.

These expressions refer to the unfulfilled 70th "week" of Daniel 9:24-27, which brings to a close Israel's national servitude under Gentile domination. The new "Age" will be introduced by the second advent of the Messiah to this earth and the consequent placing of Israel at the head of the nations. References to that "Age" are found in Hebrews 2:5, 6:5. Thus the disciples rightly connected the "end of the age" with the "Coming" of Christ; for His return to this earth and the ending of the "Age," i.e., the "Times of the Gentiles" synchronize.

What is so important to note is that in Matthew 23:39 Christ did not connect His "coming" with the destruction of Jerusalem and the overthrow of the Temple, but with the glorious epoch of Israel's national conversion. "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (vv. 4, 5). The Lord was here addressing His disciples as the representatives of the godly Jewish remnant of the future.

Matthew does not record Christ's answer to their first question, that being given in Luke. There is nothing at all in Matthew 24 parallel with Luke 21:20. Nor is there anything in it which falls, directly, within the scope of the Christian dispensation. The whole of this parenthetical dispensation is ignored, coming in as it does between the 69th and 70th "weeks" of Daniel 9. Verses 4-14 of Matthew 24 treat of the first half of the 70th "week"; verses 15-30 of its second half.

Though verses 4-7 describe conditions which have obtained, more or less, all through the centuries of this Christian era, yet will they appear in a much more intensified form during the Tribulation period. Fuller and further details concerning the time covered by Christ's prophetic discourse in Matthew 24 are furnished in the Revelation, the major portion of that book treating of the same period. At the close of this present dispensation Christendom is spewed out (Rev. 3), the saints are raptured (Rev. 4:1), and then the united company of the redeemed are seen in Heaven worshipping God (Rev. 4:4-11).

Following this, the Lamb as the "Lion" of the "tribe of Judah" takes "the book" (Rev. 5), and Israel at once appears on the scene. As soon as the "seals" of that book are broken we find that which corresponds exactly with what we have in Matthew 24. Marvelous, minute, and many are the parallels between the two chapters. At a few of them only shall we now glance. "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4, 5).

This was the first part of the Lord's reply to the questions asked by His disciples. "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four living creatures saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer" (Rev. 6:1, 2). These words picture the Anti-christ deceiving men, posing as the true Christ--of.

Revelation 19:11. "And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not troubled: for all must come to pass, but the end (i.e. of the 70th "week") is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matthew 24:6, 7). "And when He had opened the second seal I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword" (Rev. 6:3,4).

Thus the contents of the second seal correspond exactly with the second part of Christ's prophecy. "And there shall be famines" (Matthew 24:7). "And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse (the color of famine, see Lamentations 4:8; 5:10); and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst, of the four living creatures say, A measure of wheat for a penny (a day's wage, see Matthew 20:2) and three measures of barley for a penny" (Rev. 6:5, 6).

"And pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Matthew 24:7). "And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale

horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with Him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth" (Rev. 6:7,8). "All these are the beginnings of sorrows" or "birth-pangs" (Matthew 24:8).

These "birth-pangs" are the travail which shall yet precede the birth of a regenerated Israel. If the reader desires to trace out the remaining correspondences between the two chapters let him compare Matthew 24:8-28 with Revelation 6:9-11; and then Matthew 24:29,30 with Revelation 6:12-17. Passing on now to verse 15: "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, whoso readeth let him understand." This is the point which marks the division between the two halves of the 70th "week"; compare Daniel 9:27.

These words were addressed by Christ to His apostles, but the "ye" need occasion no difficulty. The Lord was speaking to them as Jews, as the representatives of those who shall be on earth at the time these things are fulfilled. That this is not a "begging of the question" should be clear by a reference to Matthew 23:39: the word "Ye" there was spoken to the scribes and pharisees as the representatives of the Nation both present and future, that is, of the nation as a unit. A similar instance is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, "Then we which are alive."

The apostle did not say "they," but addressed those Thessalonian saints, including himself, as the representatives of all believers who shall be alive on the earth at the Lord's coming in the air. The "abomination of desolation" is the image of Anti-christ (Rev. 13) which will yet be set up in the re-built Temple at Jerusalem. The reference here in Matthew 24:15 is not to the defiling of the Temple by Titus, as Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11 clearly show. It is in "the midst of the week" that "sacrifice and oblation" are made to cease.

It is then that the pseudo-Christ will throw off his mask and appear as an opposing Christ, demanding that Divine honors shall be paid to him alone: an Old Testament type of this is found in Daniel 3:1-7. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake (i.e. the sake of the godly Jewish remnant) those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21, 22) The double reference to "those days," and there is a third one in verse 19, finds its interpretation in the "when you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation" of verse 15.

It was not the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus of which Christ here spoke. His words in verse 22 are clearly parallel with Daniel 12:1, "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which stands for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book" i.e., God's "elect" among the Jews.

Thus the "great tribulation" of Matthew 24:21 instead of referring to the time when Jerusalem was destroyed and Israel dispersed, speaks of that which shall immediately precede the day when they shall be "delivered." "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe not" (Matthew 24:23). This has in view the time when the Man of Sin shall sit in the Temple of God "showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:3, 4). "For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27).

Never once is this title of Christ's used in any of the Pauline (Epistles which are addressed to the members of the Body of Christ. We are waiting the call of "God's Son" (1 Thess. 1:9, 10). "For wheresoever the

carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matthew 24:28). The "carcass" refers to the apostate mass of Israel; the "eagles" are the symbols of Divine judgment: see Deuteronomy 28:26, Ezekiel 39: 17, Revelation 19:17. "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:34).

With this should be carefully compared Matthew 12:43-45. Not only would not the Jewish nation ("generation") pass away, but it would not cease as a "wicked generation." But when Matthew 24 has been completely fulfilled then that "wicked generation" shall "pass away," and be followed by a new Nation: see Psalm 22:30, 31; 102:18; Deuteronomy 32:5, 20. The reference to "the days of Noah" in verses 37-39 are in striking accord with the rest of this prophetic discourse, and at once fix the scope thereof.

First, Noah lived at the very close of the antediluvian age: so Matthew 24 describes conditions at the very end of the Jewish age. Second, Noah and his house were saved through a great and sore judgment of God: so an elect Jewish remnant will be preserved through the great Tribulation (Rev. 12:6, 14). Third, Noah and his house came forth from the ark on to an earth which had been swept clean by the besom of destruction, and entered into a new Age: so the godly Jewish remnant pass through the great tribulation, and from them will spring millennial Israel.

Fourth, judgment consumed the ungodly: "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be." But how blessed for the Christian to remember that before the Flood began, Enoch--type of the Church--was translated! May this blessed hope be the stay of our hearts, and the purifying power for our walk. May we, instead of looking for "signs," be listening for that Sound of all sounds; instead of dreading the swiftly approaching Tribulation, be found praising God that we shall be high above it all; instead of studying the character of Mussolini or others to find in them marks of the Man of Sin, may we be "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

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