**THE ESCHATON:**
**THE LAST DAYS ACCORDING TO JESUS CHRIST**

Chapter Summary

*Eschaton* is the theological term that designates the period of time that immediately precedes and includes the second advent of Jesus Christ, together with the events that will populate and characterize that period of time. This term derives from the Greek adjective *eschatos* which means last in the phrase “last days”, as found in Acts 2:17, 2 Timothy 3:1, Hebrews 1:2, James 5:3, and 2 Peter 3:3.

*The whole motivation for diligence in practicing the mind of Christ in our lives and ministries emanates from the teaching that one day Jesus Christ will return to gather His elect unto Himself and judge all mankind for the things done in this life.*

So important is this teaching that each of the three Synoptic Gospels includes a version of the Olivet Discourse, which was given by Jesus explicitly to answer the disciples’ questions concerning the signs that would signal the imminence of His return and of the end of the age. Matthew’s version of the Olivet Discourse is especially noteworthy. In accordance with Matthew’s theological agenda of presenting the kingly facet of Jesus Christ, he coalesces into a major discourse teachings which, according to Luke’s more chronologically ordered account, were presented at various earlier times in Christ’s ministry.

The message of Scripture concerning the last days is one of hope for true disciples of Christ. While the judgments that will take place as God brings history to its consummation should strike fear in the hearts of those who have not yet submitted to Christ’s kingly rule and become citizens of His kingdom, those that belong to Him can face those days with confidence that we will be protected from the outpouring of the wrath of God.

Learning Objective

The learning objective of this theological reader is to fully grasp and internalize the significance of the second coming of Christ as the focus of our eternal hope in Him and the entire motivation for faithfulness in our service to Him and for the advancement of His kingdom in the present.
My teaching in this theological reader is based upon years of study and reflection upon the events of the last days as revealed in Scripture. However, I am fully aware that godly men have arrived at interpretations of the last days which are different from mine. While I present the discussion of the last days in this chapter fully convinced that it is accurate and faithful to the teaching of Christ and the apostles, I do not do so dogmatically. Instead, I invite reasoned discussion and debate in the spirit of doing theology in community.

Before launching into an exposition of the teachings of Jesus Christ on the last days as presented in the Olivet Discourse, allow me to briefly summarize each of the theological positions on the times of the end. The seven principal views on the Eschaton are as follows:

- Historicist
- Futurist
- Preterist
- Amillennialist
- Postmillennialist
- Historical premillennialist
- Dispensational premillennialist

The first major point of difference among these positions is whether the 1000-year reign of Christ spoken of in the 20th chapter of Revelation is to be taken literally or figuratively. Whereas both the amillennialists and postmillennialists adopt a figurative interpretation, the premillennialists adopt a literal interpretation.

The second major point of difference is over the timing of eschatological events prophesied in the Christian Scriptures. The historicists hold that these events began to occur in the 1st century. The preterists go further by holding that all prophesied events occurred in the 1st century, whereas the futurists hold that all prophesied events await a future fulfillment at the end of the age.

In the paragraphs which follow I present a brief summary of each of these views, including its history.

The historicist position regarding the Eschaton holds that the prophecies in the Christian Scriptures, including the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation, pertain to the entire
historical period from Christ’s resurrection until His second coming. That is, specific eschatological prophecies may have been partially fulfilled by historical events, and they will be ultimately and completely fulfilled by events that take place near the time of Christ’s second coming. In this regard, historical fulfillments serve as prototypes of ultimate fulfillments.

Features of the Historicism Position

The following parameters generally characterize the historicist position:

- The year-day principle, meaning that a day of prophetic time is equivalent to a year of actual or historical time.
- The 3½ year period spoken of in the 9th chapter of Daniel has been fulfilled in history.
- The Roman Pope is the Antichrist, the man of lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff, and the beast arising from the sea of Revelation 13:1ff.
- The terrible plagues of the 9th chapter of Revelation refer to the Muslim scourge.

By this list of theological parameters I am in nowise implying that all historicists embrace all of these principles and beliefs; but only that this list serves to represent some of the theological aspects of historicism.

History of the Historicist Position

In the book derived from his doctoral thesis, which is entitled The Final Prophecy of Jesus, Oral Collins makes the following assertions concerning the historicist approach to interpretation of the Book of Revelation:

This approach sees the Revelation as a forecast of the progress and destiny of the church in its conflict with Rome and the Roman Antichrist forecast in Daniel seven. Its prophecies pertain to events from the time of the New Testament church to the end-time consummation. The approach is historical, not from the standpoint of the New Testament author, but from the standpoint of the modern reader for whom much of the prophecy has already been fulfilled. It focuses on the course of church history depicting the victory of Christ over the Antichrist, the redemption of His bride, the church, the ultimate destruction of evil, and the establishment of Christ’s everlasting rule at His second coming.

The historicist school assumes that the Revelation addresses the primary concern of the persecuted church at the end of the first century – the destiny of the church under the

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1 Refer to Collins (2007), p. 11ff.
terrible Roman Beast of Daniel 7, and especially the predicted rise of the Little Horn antichrist forecast in Daniel 7:8, 11, 20-21, 24-26.

The historicist approach to the Revelation was followed by not only by nearly all Protestant interpreters during and for several centuries after the Reformation, but also by pre-Reformation dissidents from Romanism, until Jesuit scholars in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave rise to the futurist and preterist views. It was systematically developed by post-Reformation Protestants, both premillennial and postmillennial, and came to be called “the Protestant view.”

Oral Collins, himself, embraces the historicist school of interpretation. While the quotation above is addressed to the Book of Revelation specifically, the historicist position applies also to the other eschatological prophecies of the Christian Scriptures, especially those of Jesus Christ Himself in the Olivet Discourse. According to Collins, the historicist school of interpretation is ancient, having been embraced by the Church Fathers until the time of Augustine in the 4th century AD. As stated in the above quotations, historicism continued as an important strand of eschatological teaching in parallel with amillennialism introduced by Augustine, and futurism and preterism introduced by Jesuit scholars, through the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods. In fact, Collins lists the works of a number of scholars and theologians of the 19th and 20th centuries who promulgated this view. Interestingly, historicism can be embraced by both pre- and post-millennialists without compromise.

### Futurist and Preterist Positions

Because the historicist position identified the Roman Pope with the antichrist, the Counter-Reformation movement of the 16th and 17th centuries served up alternative eschatological positions that were less offensive to Romanism.

The first of these was **futurism**, which was introduced by Ribera, a Jesuit priest and Counter-Reformation scholar of the late 16th century AD. Ribera taught that all eschatological events after the seal judgments of Revelation 6:1-8:5 prophesied in the Book of Revelation will occur during the time period immediately preceding the second coming of Jesus Christ. In particular, a future antichrist will arise at that time, and he will wage war against the saints in accordance with Revelation 13:ff. In general, the futurist position teaches that eschatological events predicted in the Christian Scriptures await fulfillment during the times of the end just prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The second of these positions was **preterism**; it was promulgated by Alcasar, a Jesuit priest of the early 17th century AD. He taught that all eschatological events prophesied in the Christian Scriptures had occurred by the end of the 1st century AD. In particular, the antichrist was one of
the emperors of the pagan Roman Empire. In fact, R. C. Sproul identifies Nero as a 1st century candidate for the antichrist, and he adduces objective evidence in support of this identification.  

| Amillennialist Position |

The introduction of amillennialism is attributed to Eusebius (ca. early 4th century AD), who promulgated this teaching on account of his distaste for a literal millennium. Augustine (ca. 354-430 AD) further developed and articulated the position in his magisterial work, *The City of God*. As the name implies, the cardinal teaching of the position is that there is no literal millennial kingdom. The key tenets of the position are as follows:

- A figurative interpretation of the 1,000 reign of Christ on earth predicted in Revelation 20:1ff is adopted whereby this prophesy refers to the present reign of Christ over deceased saints in heaven.
- The binding of Satan according to Revelation 20:1-4 is interpreted figuratively whereby Satan’s operations are limited on account of Christ’s resurrection victory.
- The church replaces Israel as the embodiment of God’s kingdom on earth, and the proclamation of the Christian gospel by the church will prevail. In particular, the kingdom prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures are being fulfilled in the church.
- The arising of the antichrist and a 3½ - year period of intense tribulation will precede the second coming of Jesus Christ.
- Christ will return to execute judgment of all mankind and usher in His eternal kingdom.

Not only does this position overlook prophecies of the restoration of Israel, but it seems to compromise the teaching of the Book of Revelation to the extent that it falls prey to the curse of Revelation 22:18-19. Moreover, its teaching concerning the binding of Satan seems to be contradicted by the clear teaching of the apostles – especially Peter and Paul – that Satan must be strenuously resisted, and that he is presently prowling about like a lion, seeking someone to devour.

| Postmillennialist Position |

As the name implies, postmillennialism teaches that Christ's return will take place after a millennial period. The roots of postmillennialism can be traced back to the Patristic Period –  

especially the Alexandrian School with its distaste for literal interpretation. However, the development and articulation of this position occurred mainly during the modern period – in particular, during the 19th and early 20th centuries AD. Modern period proponents include Jonathan Edwards (18th century) and Charles Hodge (19th century). The key tenets of the position are as follows:

- A figurative interpretation of the 1,000 reign of Christ on earth predicted in Revelation 20:1ff is adopted whereby this prophesy refers to the present reign of Christ over the church. In fact, the church has replaced Israel as the embodiment of God’s kingdom on earth.

- As in the amillennialist position, the binding of Satan according to Revelation 20:1-4 is interpreted figuratively whereby Satan's operations are limited on account of Christ's resurrection victory.

- The Christian gospel by the church will prevail. This will take place to the extent that the entire world will be transformed religiously, politically, and economically, and all peoples will brought into submission to the righteous rule of Christ as king.

- Just before the return of Christ, there will be a 3½ - year period of apostasy. During this period, the antichrist will arise; he will wage war against the saints and bring about a period of intense tribulation.

- After this period of apostasy, Christ will return to execute judgment of all mankind and usher in His eternal kingdom.

The postmillennialist position is based upon an overly optimistic view of the success of the church in proclaiming the Christian gospel and bringing about a religious, political, and economic utopia on earth. As the 20th century unfolded, and on account of two world wars, the postmillennialist position came to be increasingly rejected.

### Historical Premillennialist Position

Both the historical premillennialist position and the dispensational premillennialist position, to which we turn next, embrace a literal interpretation of the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth predicted in Revelation 20:1ff. The principle difference between these two views is in regard to the time when the gathering of the elect will take place in relation to Christ’s second coming.

### Summary of the Historical Premillennialist Position

The key tenets of the position are as follows:

- The 70th week of the 9th chapter of Daniel is embraced as a literal 7-year period that will occur just prior to the return of Jesus Christ. At approximately the midpoint of this period,
The antichrist will arise; he corresponds to the little horn of Daniel 7:8ff, the man of lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff, and the beast that arises from the sea in Revelation 13:1ff.

Near the end of this 7-year period, the antichrist will cause an image to himself to be erected in temple, and he will inflict a short period of intense persecution of Christians that will be terminated by the return of Jesus Christ.

Upon His return, Jesus will gather His elect into a place of protection, and He will bring to bear upon the wicked the day of Yahweh judgments, which have been prophesied since the time of Enoch, the 7th generation from Adam.

After these judgments, Christ will usher in His 1,000-year rule over all the nations and peoples of the world in accordance with Revelation 20:1ff and all the kingdom prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The present church age is an interlude between the ending of Daniel’s 69th week and the beginning of the 70th. During this period, the embodiment of the kingdom of God on earth is the church of Jesus Christ, which is an integrated covenant community consisting of both Jews and Gentiles.

History of the Historical Premillennialist Position

The theological tradition represented by this position originates with the early Church Fathers, including Papius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. After Augustine introduced his amillennialist view in the late 4th century, the historical premillennialist position lost favor until the Post-Reformation period in the 17th century. Principal among the modern proponents of this view are George Eldon Ladd and Millard Erickson.

In contrast to the dispensational premillennialist position, the historical premillennialist position is founded upon a careful reading of Christ’s Olivet Discourse, which provides a chronological framework for reading and interpreting other eschatological passages. While this position embraces the statement of Christ that we cannot know the time of His return in an absolute sense, it also embraces His having set forth a progression of signs in the Olivet Discourse that will signal its imminence.

Dispensational Premillennialist Position

Like the historical premillennialist position, the dispensational premillennialist position embraces a literal interpretation of the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth predicted in Revelation 20:1ff. However, unlike the former position, this position teaches that a secret rapture event will occur just prior to the beginning of the period of time represented by Daniel’s 70th week. As a result,
Christ will physically remove the church from planet earth during the entirety of that 7-year period, which is designated the *tribulation period*. Thus, according to this position, there are no prophesied events that must occur prior to the postulated *pre-tribulational rapture*.

**Summary of the Dispensational Premillennialist Position**

The key tenets of the position are as follows:

- Regarding the events predicted by Christ in the Olivet Discourse that will occur just prior to His return, these predictions are relevant to the Jews, but not to the church.

> **In other words, according to the dispensational premillennialist position, the Olivet Discourse was addressed to Israel and not to the church.**

- The 70th week of the 9th chapter of Daniel is embraced as a literal 7-year period that will occur just prior to the return of Jesus Christ, this entire period being designated the *tribulation period*. At approximately the midpoint of the period, the antichrist will arise; he corresponds to the little horn of Daniel 7:8ff, the man of lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff, and the beast that arises from the sea in Revelation 13:1ff.

- Near the end of this 7-year period, the antichrist will cause an image to himself to be erected in temple, and he will inflict a short period of intense persecution of the Jews that will be terminated by the return of Jesus Christ.

- Upon His return, Jesus will gather His Jewish elect into a place of protection, and He will bring to bear upon the wicked the day of Yahweh judgments, which have been prophesied since the time of Enoch, the 7th generation from Adam.

- After these judgments, Christ will usher in His 1,000-year rule over all the nations and peoples of the world in accordance with Revelation 20:1ff and all the kingdom prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures.

- The present church age is an interlude between the ending of Daniel’s 69th week and the beginning of the 70th. During this period, the embodiment of the kingdom of God on earth is the church of Jesus Christ, which is an integrated covenant community consisting of both Jews and Gentiles.
The Postulated Imminence of the Pretribulational Rapture Event

The fact that the dispensational premillennialist is absolutely convinced that no predicted signs have been given to the church announcing the imminence of the pretribulational rapture event is placed in evidence by the following quotation from Things to Come by J. D. Pentecost:

Many signs have been given to the nation Israel, which would precede the second advent, so that the nation might be living in expectancy when the time of His coming should draw nigh. Although Israel could not know the day nor the hour when the Lord will come, yet they can know that their redemption draweth nigh through the fulfillment of these signs. To the church no such signs were ever given. The church was told to live in the light of the imminent coming of the Lord to translate them in His presence. 3

Immediately after this statement, Pentecost lists a number of Scripture passages, which of course exclude the Olivet Discourse. The first two sentences in the above quotation obviously refer to the Olivet Discourse, and they place in evidence that the dispensational premillennialist is convinced that the Olivet Discourse is addressed only to Israel and not to the church. Let us analyze this conviction by considering the following points:

- Let us accept that the Gospel of Matthew is addressed primarily to a Jewish audience. Does this mean, however, that it is not at all relevant to a Gentile audience as well? After all, the immediate audience for Christ’s Olivet Discourse is clearly identified in the context as the disciples. And He addresses His Great Commission to identically the same immediate audience in accordance with Matthew 28:16-20. The Great Commission is generally accepted as relevant to the church, and it has served as the principal motivation for the modern mission movement pioneered by William Cary in the 19th century. If the Great Commission in Matthew is relevant to the church, then why isn’t the Olivet Discourse in Matthew also relevant?

- Temporarily setting aside the relevance of Matthew’s Olivet Discourse to a Gentile audience, what about Mark’s Olivet Discourse, which is an abbreviated form of Matthew’s? The Gospel of Mark is generally accepted as having been addressed to a Greco-Roman audience, and yet it identifies the same key sign – the abomination that makes desolate from the 9th chapter of Daniel. Later in this theological reader, I place in evidence that the abomination that make desolate will appear 45 days prior to Christ’s return to gather His elect and bring judgment to bear upon the wicked.

- In the 5th chapter of Paul’s 1st letter to the church of Thessalonica, he clearly teaches that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night to the unbelievers, but not to the believers. Why? Because of the signs set forth by Christ in the Olivet Discourse.

3 Refer to Pentecost (1964), pp. 202-203.
In the 2nd chapter of Paul’s 2nd letter to the church of Thessalonica he clearly sets forth the order of events that will *immediately precede* the “coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him.” (2 Thessalonians 2:1). In other words, the church will be present to witness the arising of the man of lawlessness or the antichrist. Therefore, the church will suffer the intense persecution inflicted by the antichrist.

The chronological order set forth by Paul in his Thessalonian letters correlates perfectly with that set forth by Christ in the Olivet Discourse and Daniel in his vision of the Seventy Weeks if we accept that the gathering of the elect (Matthew 24:31) and the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16ff) are the same event.

The dispensational premillennialist asserts that the restraining factor mentioned by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 is the Holy Spirit, who will remove Himself when the church is raptured by Christ. However, the text does not require this identification. Moreover, the identification of the Holy Spirit as the restrainer is contracted by the fact that the dispensational premillennialist also teaches that multitudes of both Jews and Gentiles will come to faith during the tribulation period. For this to take place, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit during the entire 7-year period is necessary.

I submit that the restrainer is the Archangel Michael identified in Daniel 12:1. Regrettably, most English translations of this passage obscure what the Archangel Gabriel revealed to Daniel. Following is the quotation of the passage from the HCSB:

> At that time Michael the great prince who stands watch (= ‘amad) over your people will rise up (= ‘amad). There will be a time of distress such as never has occurred since nations came into being until that time. But at that time all your people who are found written in the book will escape. [Daniel 12:1, HCSB]

As parenthetically noted, the lexical form of the Hebrew verb translated “stands watch” and “rise up” is ‘amad. While “rise up” is a permissible translation in the second instance, a alternative translation that better fits the context would be “stand aside”. Adopting this proposal for the sake of argument, I propose the following more accurate rendering of the passage:

> At that time Michael the great prince who stands watch over your people will stand aside. There will be a time of distress such as never has occurred since nations came into being until that time. But at that time all your people who are found written in the book will escape. [Daniel 12:1, adapted from the HCSB]

With this rendering, the passage is seen to exactly correlate with Paul’s teaching in the 2nd chapter of 2 Thessalonians.
History of the Dispensational Premillennialist Position

The dispensational premillennialist position arose in the 19th century as an alternative eschatology to that promoted and taught by the postmillennialists. Its initial impetus arose from the teaching of Edward Irving, a church of Scotland minister. However, John N. Darby, the founder of the Plymouth Brethren movement, was the one who shaped, developed, and promoted the position to the extent that it became widely accepted and embraced. Among the prominent theologians, scholars, and Christian leaders who embraced the position toward the end of the 19th century and into the 20th were the following: H. A. Ironside, C. I. Scofield, R. A. Torrey, L. S. Chafer, J. D. Pentecost, J. Walvoord, and C. C. Ryrie. In fact, through the work of Lewis Sperry Chafer, the position was generally embraced by the faculty and became entrenched in the teaching of Dallas Theological Seminary by the middle of the 20th century. Moreover, the position was popularized through the notes embedded into the Scofield Reference Bible.

Concluding Remarks Concerning the Seven Views on the Eschaton

I believe we can dispense with five of the views summarized above as being fatally flawed:

**Preterism.** The facts of history place in evidence that there have, indeed, been partial fulfillments or prefigurements of prophesied events that took place before the end of the 1st century AD. However, the preterist holds that all prophesied events took place before the end of the 1st century, which is obviously false.

**Futurism.** In like manner, the futurist holds that the fulfillment of all prophesied events await the last days. In other words, the futurist cannot abide partial fulfillments and prefigurements, which is also false.

**Historicism.** This position allows for partial fulfillments and prefigurements over the course of church history and ultimate fulfillments during the last days. This is a sensible position with respect to the nature of prophecy in the Christian Scriptures.

**Amillennialism.** This position compromises the teaching of the Book of Revelation to the extent that it falls prey to the curse of Revelation 22:18-19. Moreover, its assertion that Satan is presently bound is contradicted by the clear teaching of the apostles – especially Peter and Paul – that Satan must be strenuously resisted, and that he is presently prowling about like a lion, seeking someone to devour.

**Postmillennialism.** The postmillennialist position is based upon an overly optimistic view of the success of the church in proclaiming the Christian gospel and bringing about a religious, political, and economic utopia on earth. The trajectory of history from the beginning of the
20th century to the present is characterized by warfare, violence, and increased chaos. At the same time, the church has been increasingly marginalized.

- **Historical premillennialism.** This position seems to fit all the relevant Scriptures except for the apparent need for a significant interval between the rapture and the second coming, which is discussed below.

- **Dispensational premillennialism.** This position suffers from multiple exegetical and logical problems, principal among which is the refusal to embrace the Olivet Discourse as being relevant to the church.

Accordingly, of the seven eschatological positions summarized in this section, only **historicism** coupled with **historical premillennialism** survive critical examination.

The problem associated with historical premillennialism is a **logistical one**. In *Things to Come*, J. D. Pentecost argues that an interval of time is required between the rapture event and the second coming of Christ. 4 While this issue, by itself, by no means justifies embracing the dispensational premillennialist position, it does deserve some discussion. In my discussion of this issue, I take the gathering of the elect according to Matthew 24:31 to be equivalent to the rapture described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.

Pentecost asserts that there are a number biblically mandated events that would need to occur between the rapture – that is, the gathering of the elect – and the second coming, when the elect will accompany Christ in accordance with John’s vision in Revelation 19:11ff. These events include at least the following:

- The judgment seat of Christ, at which the elect will be rewarded according to what they have accomplished for the cause of Christ during this present life.

- The formal presentation of the church as the bride of Christ and the marriage supper of the lamb in accordance with John’s vision in Revelation 19:6ff.

What I would say in response to Pentecost’s argument is this: by means of the rapture event, the church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles – an integrated covenant community – is translated into the sphere where God dwells for the events listed above, and whatever other things must take place, between the rapture event and their return with Christ to witness the Day of Yahweh judgments in accordance with Revelation 19:11ff. **That reality where God dwells is not subject to time as we know it**, as stated by the Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:8.

4 Refer to Pentecost (1964), pp. 205-206.
Therefore, from the viewpoint of an observer on planet earth, the rapture can take place at one instant and the elect can return with Christ in the very next instant. And yet from the viewpoint of an observer in that heavenly sphere, where all the intervening events are taking place, a 1,000 years could elapse between the rapture event and the second coming.

Thus, the logistical problem identified by Pentecost results from his erroneously imposing our understanding of time on the heavenly reality where God dwells.

**The Last Days According to Jesus: The Olivet Discourse**

As we endeavor to practice the principles of biblical theology, paying careful attention to what the biblical text is telling us concerning the meaning intended by the author, the fact becomes clear that the Olivet Discourse, especially that recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, is the key to understanding the last days.

**Setting of the Olivet Discourse**

Referring to Figure 1, the setting for the Olivet Discourse, as recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, was this: near the middle of His passion week – probably in the afternoon – Jesus had completed His public teaching and apologetic ministry, which is recorded in the 21st through the 23rd chapters of Matthew’s Gospel. The venue for this public ministry was most likely Solomon’s colonnade on the southern end of the temple complex – the structure with the red roof as shown in Figure 1. Jesus and his disciples made their way across the temple platform toward the...
northeastern corner where the eastern gate was located. As they did so, they passed in front of the magnificent temple proper, which is depicted in Figure 2. At this point, according to Matthew 24:1, the disciples directed Jesus’ attention to the “temple buildings”. In response, Jesus made the following incredible statement:

And He said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” [Matthew 24:2, NASB]

This statement by Jesus flabbergasted the disciples. After all, the temple was their pride and joy – the very centerpiece of their worship of Yahweh.

Referring to Figure 3, Jesus and his disciples passed out through the eastern gate, across the Kidron Valley, and to the summit of the Mount of Olives, from which they could look down upon the entire temple mount. After He was seated, the disciples came to him with a question.

Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? [Matthew 24:3b, NASB]
This is a multi-part question. The disciples assumed that the destruction of the temple would be associated with two things: first, the end times; and, second, with Jesus’ coming to establish His rule over all the nations, as prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures. We can unpack their multi-part question as follows:

- **When will these things happen?** That is, what is the timeline that leads up to Your coming? Note that the word they used for coming is *parousia*, which means an arrival followed by an abiding presence.

- **What will be the sign of Your coming?** That is, what event or events will signal the imminence of Your coming? Note that the word they used for sign is *semeion*, which means an event that presages or signals the imminence of another event.

- **What will be the sign of the end of the age?** That is, what event or events will signal the imminence of the end of the age and the beginning of the age to come?

### Significance of the Olivet Discourse

Jesus did not offer a direct answer to the question of “when will these things happen?” However, He did explicitly answer the question as to the signs that would precede and accompany His coming and the end of the age. In fact, Jesus reveals the progressively unfolding events that will signal the imminence of His *parousia* – His arrival followed by His abiding presence.
Thus, the Olivet Discourse is that unique passage of Scripture which declares itself to be determinative with reference to the story of the end of history.

It also serves as the uniquely determinative framework for our interpreting and understanding all the other prophetical passages that deal with the last days, including those of Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Zechariah, Paul, and John. In what follows, I will place in evidence the fact that the progressively unfolding signs predicted by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse correspond with and parallel the visions of the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation. In other words, through his vivid word pictures, John illustrates the predictions of Jesus Christ contained within the Olivet Discourse.

The Times of the Gentiles: Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

Before walking through the Olivet Discourse to discern the progressively unfolding signs that Jesus predicted would presage His coming, it is important that we take a moment to consider the dream by which Yahweh revealed to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the succession of world empires that would rule over the Mediterranean region. Daniel’s interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is recorded in Daniel 2:31-45. In his dream, the king saw a great image which was constructed from various materials, including gold, silver, bronze, iron, and iron mixed with clay. According to Daniel’s interpretation, each of the parts of the image represented one of the great world empires as follows:

- Head of gold = Babylonian Empire, ca. 605-539 BC.  
- Chest and arms of silver = Persian Empire, ca. 539-331 BC. 
- Belly and thighs of bronze = Grecian Empire, ca. 331-63 BC. 
- Legs of iron and feet of iron mixed with clay = Roman Empire, beginning ca. 63 BC. 

As delineated in Figure 4, the scope of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream embraced the entire extent of the times of the Gentiles – an important technical term referred to by Jesus in Luke’s version of the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21:24). During this extended period of time, Jerusalem would be trampled by the Gentiles. Thus, the times of the Gentiles commenced in 605 BC with Nebuchadnezzar’s first assault upon Jerusalem, at which time the first wave of Jews, including Daniel and his three friends, were deported to Babylon. And, as indicated in the figure, the times of the Gentiles continues all the way to a future time corresponding to the second coming of Jesus Christ. When He comes, He will put an end to the times of the Gentiles, and He will establish His own worldwide dominion from the throne of His forefather David in Jerusalem.

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6 The dates define the period of hegemony over the Levant and the land of Israel.
In fact, Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel’s interpretation thereof defines the overall chronological framework for discussing the last days.

The Olivet Discourse: the Progressively Unfolding Signs That Would Presage the Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Returning to the Olivet Discourse, Jesus predicts seven phases of progressively unfolding signs that would presage His coming. In the discussion which follows, I show the correspondence of His predictions in the 24th chapter of Matthew with other prophetic passages.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Jesus’ predictions in Matthew 24:4-14 correspond to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse of Revelation 6:1-8, which are illustrated in Figure 5. The significance of each of the Four Horsemen is defined within the context of the 6th chapter of Revelation as follows:

- The rider on the white horse represents a messianic conqueror figure that will appear on the stage of history – a fake messiah.
- The rider on the red horse represents the eruption of military conflict.
The rider on the black horse represents famine.

And the rider on the pale horse represents death.

Let us now walk through the seven phases of the last days according to Jesus Christ from His Olivet Discourse as recorded in the 24th chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. Parallel passages are located in the 13th chapter of Mark’s Gospel and the 21st chapter of Luke’s.

Phase One: Appearance of a Messianic Conqueror Figure

And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray...” [Matthew 24:4-5, ESV]

Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer. [Revelation 6:1-2, ESV]
Structure of the Book of Revelation

I need to pause at this point in order to briefly explain the structure of the Book of Revelation. From the beginning of the 6th chapter through the 16th chapter, the Book of Revelation is ordered according to a sequence of judgments as follows:

- Seven seal judgments – Revelation 6:1 – 8:5.
- Seven trumpet judgments – Revelation 8:6 – 11:19.

As one carefully studies these three judgment sequences, the fact becomes evident that they are not concatenated – that is, each one beginning only after the preceding one is completed – but rather they are nested, as illustrated by Figure 6. This means that all three share a common terminus. One can picture the 7th seal judgment spawning the seven trumpet judgments, and the 7th trumpet judgment spawning the seven bowl judgments, as delineated in Figure 6.

Twelve interlude passages are distributed throughout the main body of the book as follows:

- The sealing of the 144,000 and the vision of the great multitude – Revelation 7:1-17.
- The vision of the angel and the little scroll – Revelation 10:1-11.
- The vision of the two witnesses – Revelation 11:1-14.
- The vision of the pregnant women and the great red dragon – Revelation 12:1-17.
- The vision of the Lamb and the 144,000 – Revelation 14:1-5.
The vision of the harvesting of the earth – Revelation 14:14-20.


The vision of rejoicing in heaven and the marriage supper of the Lamb – Revelation 19:1-10.

The vision of the rider on the white horse – Revelation 19:11-21.

The Rider on the White Horse

This brings us back to Phase One of the progressively unfolding signs that will presage the second coming of Jesus Christ. The rider on the white horse of Revelation 6:1-2 is not to be confused with the rider on the white horse of Revelation 19:11ff. The 2nd rider is clearly identified in context as Jesus Christ, the Son of God. However, the 1st rider, who is associated with the Lamb’s breaking of the 1st seal, is a false messiah – one who presents himself in such a way as to masquerade as the conquering Messiah King. I believe Alexander the Great serves as an historical prototype of the messianic conqueror figure to which Revelation 6:1-2 refers. I will have more to say about this figure in the discussion of Phase Six of the progressively unfolding signs that presage the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Notice how the prediction of Jesus in Matthew 24:4-5 and the word picture presented by John in Revelation 6:1-2 complement one another. Whereas Jesus focuses upon the true character of the one who will come in His name – that is, an imposter and a deceiver – John presents a word picture that illustrates how this imposter will present himself – that is, as a messianic conqueror.

Phase Two: Eruption of Military Conflict in the Near East With Jerusalem at the Epicenter

“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...” [Matthew 24:6-7a, ESV]

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword. [Revelation 6:3-4, ESV]

And so Phase Two of the progressively unfolding events that will presage the second coming of Jesus Christ is the eruption of military conflict. While Jesus is not explicit in his prediction as to where this conflict will erupt, we have the prophecy of Ezekiel in the 38th chapter, to which we now turn.
The word of Yahweh came to me: Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him and say, Thus says the Adonai Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. And I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armor, a great host, all of them with buckler and shield, wielding swords. Persia, Cush, and Put are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all his hordes; Beth-togarmah from the uttermost parts of the north with all his hordes – many peoples are with you. Be ready and keep ready, you and all your hosts that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. After many days you will be mustered. In the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war, the land whose people were gathered from many peoples upon the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste. Its people were brought out from the peoples and now dwell securely, all of them... [Ezekiel 38:1–8, adapted from the ESV]

The Gog-Magog Confederacy

Ezekiel predicts that in the last days there will be a great confederacy of nations that will invade the nation of Israel. Note from the 5th verse that this confederacy will include Persia, which corresponds to modern Iran. It also includes “Beth-togarmah from the uttermost parts of the north”. If one examines a map of Asia, the fact becomes evident that Moscow is almost due north of Jerusalem. Therefore, the Gog-Magog confederacy of nations includes Russia. The fact that Russia and Iran are allies, and that the leaders of Iran have repeatedly declared their intent to annihilate Israel, are most noteworthy in the light of Ezekiel’s prophecy.

Because the military conflict prophesied by Ezekiel will erupt in the near east – that is, the eastern Mediterranean region focused on Jerusalem as epicenter – the world’s energy supply will almost certainly be disrupted.

Phase Three: Unusually Severe and Widespread Famines and Earthquakes

“... and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.” [Matthew 24:7b-8, ESV]

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!” [Revelation 6:5-6, ESV]

Phase Three of the progressively unfolding events that presage the second coming of Jesus Christ is the occurrence of famine and earthquakes.
While there certainly have been devastating earthquakes in recent years, including the one that caused the terrible tsunami of December 2004 and more recently those in Pakistan, China, Haiti, and Japan, I believe there is coming a series of earthquakes in various places that will be unusually severe and devastating.

Moreover, in recent years there have also been famines in various parts of the world, in some cases very severe. In most cases, they have resulted from poor food distribution brought about by corrupt governments. However, I believe there is coming a time when famines will be widespread and severe. In this connection, let me ask, what would happen if the world’s energy supply were to be disrupted? Food production and distribution, that both rely upon the availability of large amounts of energy, will be curtailed.

Phase Four: Widespread Lawlessness and Intense Persecution of Christians

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.”
[Matthew 24:9-12, ESV]

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.
[Revelation 6:7-8, ESV]

Phase Four of the progressively unfolding events that will presage the second coming of Jesus Christ is characterized by widespread lawlessness and intense persecution of Christians.

I need to interject at this point that each of the events that Jesus predicted have taken place at various times in history. False messiahs have arisen, and there have been terrible military conflicts, devastating earthquakes, severe famines, and grievous persecutions of Christians. However, there is coming a time when the entire sequence of unfolding events predicted by Jesus will occur. And when that happens, the people of the world will recognize the unmistakable imprint of God. Towards whom will they direct the fury of their hatred but the people of God?

With the world’s energy supply disrupted, the ability of governments – especially in the so-called developed nations – to maintain law and order will be reduced, if not eliminated altogether. In fact, most, if not all, of the technological advances of the past two centuries will be erased, and anarchy and lawlessness will prevail. Because of widespread famines and devastating earthquakes, people will attack and pillage one another for a bit of food or some money to buy food.
Phase Five: Worldwide Proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. [Matthew 24:13-14, ESV]

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. [Revelation 6:9-11, ESV]

Phase Five of the progressively unfolding events that presage the second coming of Jesus Christ will be the worldwide proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Where in our world is the kingdom of God advancing to the greatest extent? The answer is that it is advancing most rapidly in places characterized by the most intense persecution of Christians. Note well Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:14 that the end – that is, the telos – will come only after the worldwide proclamation of the gospel as a testimony to all nations. 7

Phase Six: Appearance of the Abomination that Makes Desolate

“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.” [Matthew 24:15-20, ESV]

“So seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to anoint for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

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7 The Greek word telos signifies that which is the logical, although not necessarily chronological, conclusion or completion point. In this case, the telos marks the end of the times of the Gentiles spoken of by Jesus in Luke 21:24.
And after the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a firm covenant with many for one week, and in the middle of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator." [Daniel 9:24-27, adapted from the ESV]

Phase Six of the progressively unfolding events that presage the second coming of Jesus Christ is the appearance of the abomination that makes desolate spoken of through Daniel the prophet.

Daniel’s Vision of the Seventy Weeks

In Matthew 24:15 Jesus refers to Daniel’s Vision of the Seventy Weeks, which is recorded in the 9th chapter of the Book of Daniel and is quoted above. In Figure 7 I have endeavored to lay out the timeline of events seen by Daniel in his remarkable Vision of the Seventy Weeks.

Each of the weeks represents a time period of seven years, where each prophetic year consists of 360 days, as can be determined within the context of Daniel’s prophecy. Thus, the entire period of 70 weeks represents 490 prophetic years. The event which triggers the start of the 490 years is the decree issued by Artaxerxes to Nehemiah to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, which occurred in the month of Nisan in the 20th regnal year of the king in accordance with Nehemiah 2:1ff. The calendar date for this event is 445 BC. The period from this date until “Messiah the Prince” is cut off is 69 of the 70 weeks, or 483 prophetic years. Taking into account that a calendar year actually consists of 365 ¼ days instead of 360, the calendar date for the cutting off of Messiah the Prince is calculated to be 31 AD, which accords well with what we know of the timeline of Jesus’ life and ministry.

How about the leftover week? Is it contiguous with the preceding 69 weeks, or is there an interlude between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th. While there is a school of eschatological thought that insists that the 69th and 70th weeks are contiguous, I believe most biblical scholars agree that there is an interlude of undisclosed duration between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th.

Regarding this issue, consider the following observations from Daniel’s prophecy:

- **The little horn of Daniel 7:8.** There are two little horns seen by Daniel, the first appearing in Daniel 7:8 in the context of the vision of the four beasts; in particular, it is connected with the vision of the fourth beast, which represents the Roman Empire.

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8 In particular, the critical period of 3 ½ years that starts with the appearance of the abomination that makes desolate is specified in terms of days later in Daniel’s prophecy. In particular, refer to Daniel 12:11-12.
Based upon the representation of the little horn in Daniel 7:8-14, we can be quite certain that it points to the Antichrist, which is represented by the first beast seen by John in Revelation 13:1ff.

- **The little horn of Daniel 8:9**. The second little horn arises in connection with the vision of the male goat in Daniel 8:5ff. Thus, it emerges from Grecian Empire founded by Alexander the Great. As we carefully read this passage along with Gabriel's interpretation in Daniel 8:18-26, the fact becomes evident that it has a near-term fulfillment in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who reigned over the Selucid segment of the Greecian Empire, ca. 175-164 BC. However, it seems also to have a far-term fulfillment in a ruler who will arise during the times of the end. However, as is typical of prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures, the near-term prototype and the far-term fulfillment are conflated. Thus, in the course of the unfolding vision and Gabriel's interpretation thereof, there is an ellipsis of over two millennia between the near-term prototype and the far-term eschatological fulfillment.

- **The people of the prince who is to come**. This phrase occurs in Daniel 9:26. The “prince who is to come” refers to a future world ruler that we commonly designate the Antichrist. This ruler corresponds to the little horn of Daniel 7:8, and to the beast that emerges from the sea in Revelation 13:1ff. The “people of the prince” refers to the Roman army under Titus, who conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in 70 AD. Thus, as I noted in connection with the little horn of Daniel 7:8, the “prince” of Daniel 9:26 will emerge from the Roman system – that is, a revived Roman Empire that will take shape during the times of the end.
end. According to Daniel 9:27, at the beginning of the 70th week, this prince will establish a firm covenant with the Jews which allows them to re-institute temple worship – something that has not yet come to pass. Therefore, an ellipsis of nearly two millennia separates the timeframe of the “people of the prince” from the timeframe of the “prince”.

From these observations, the fact is evident that in Daniel’s visions near-term and far-term events are conflated; that is, they are represented in his visions as contiguous, whereas the events of history place in evidence that they are actually separated by a period of the order of two millennia. In particular, the last observation shows that the end of the 69th week, corresponding to when Messiah is cut off, and the beginning of the 70th week, corresponding to the enactment of the covenant with the Jews, is, in fact, separated by an intervening ellipsis of approximately two millennia and counting.

**Time Line of the 70th Week**

From statements in Daniel combined with those from the lips of Jesus in the 24th chapter of Matthew, we can establish a time line for the 70th week. The duration of this period of time in days is as follows:

\[ 7 \times \left( \frac{360 \text{ days}}{\text{prophetic year}} \right) = 2,520 \text{ days} \]

According to Daniel 12:12, the length of time from the breaking of the covenant and the cessation of temple sacrifices to the end of the week is 1,335 days. And according to Daniel 12:11, the length of time from the breaking of the covenant and the cessation of temple sacrifices to the appearance of the abomination that makes desolate is 1,290 days.

Thus, we can piece together information from Daniel and the 24th chapter of Matthew to develop the time line for the 70th week set forth in Figure 8. This time line places in evidence the fact that duration of the great tribulation from the setting up of the abomination that makes desolate until the return of Christ is only 45 days.

Based upon the time line of Figure 8, Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:22 now makes sense. The period of intense persecution of God’s people, or the elect, will indeed be constrained by God to only 45 days or 1½ months. Moreover, Jesus’ statement in Luke 21:28 – Luke’s version of the Olivet Discourse – also makes sense.
Figure 8. Time Line of the 70th Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time From Beginning (Days)</th>
<th>Time To End (Days)</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,520</td>
<td>End time ruler enacts covenant with the Jews; temple worship is re-instituted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,185</td>
<td>1,335</td>
<td>End time ruler – the Antichrist – breaks covenant with the Jews; temple worship ceases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,475</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>The abomination that makes desolate is set up; great tribulation commences in accordance with Matthew 24:15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,520</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>The telos (i.e., the end or completion point); Christ returns in accordance with Matthew 24:29.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correspondence With the Rider on the White Horse

And now please allow me to engage in some speculation. According to Daniel, the event that marks the beginning of the 70th week is the arising of a ruler who will make a covenant with the Jews, allowing them to rebuild their temple and resume sacrificial worship. I believe the ruler to which this prophecy refers is the messianic conqueror figure represented by the rider on the white horse in Revelation 6:1-2. Accordingly, I would place the entire sequence of events represented by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in the first 1,185 days of Daniel’s 70th week.

Appearance of the Antichrist

However, approximately half way through the 7-year period represented by the 70th week – that is, after 1,185 days – a different ruler will arise. As we will discuss more fully in connection with Phase Seven: The Great Tribulation, he will break the covenant with the Jews and cause there to be set up an image of himself in the holy place. This image of the Antichrist is the abomination that makes desolate.

It is true that Christians down through the centuries have expected the return of Christ within their life spans. In fact, there have been a number of points in history when Christians have made the mistake of setting a firm date for Christ’s return! While Jesus stated emphatically that we cannot know the day or the hour, he also stated with equal emphasis that we should be alert to the unfolding signs that signal the imminence of His return. In our day, we can see a distinct
correlation between the contemporary geo-political situation in the near east with the sequence of events predicted by Jesus Christ in His Olivet Discourse. In fact, I don’t believe such a strong correlation has ever occurred before in history. Consider the following:

- **Iran’s nuclear ambition.** The leaders of Iran have vowed to annihilate Israel, and there is a strong consensus among the international community that they are tenaciously pursuing the development of a nuclear weapon for this very purpose.

- **The 12th Imam.** Moreover, the leaders of Iran regard their triggering of a worldwide conflagration as a matter of religious calling in order to usher in the rule of the 12th Imam, who represents the Islamic version of the predicted messianic conqueror.

- **Israel’s preemptive strike.** Israel, already possessing nuclear weapons, is not likely to allow itself to be attacked. At any time it is possible that Israel will launch a preemptive strike against Iran.

- **Alignment of Russia with Iran.** Should this occur, Russia, along with the other Islamic nations in the middle east, would be expected to ally themselves with Iran in retaliation against Israel. This would seem to correspond to the great battle prophesied by Ezekiel.

- **Be ever watchful and prepared.** Like every generation of Christians that has preceded us, we are operating under the stern and repeated command of Jesus Christ to prepare ourselves for the possibility that we are the generation that will be alive on planet Earth when He returns to gather His elect and execute judgment upon all mankind.

While we cannot know in advance the precise day of Christ’s return, we do know this: from the setting up of the abomination that makes desolate until the telos – that is, the end or completion point – there will be a period of only 45 days or 1½ months in accordance with Figure 8.

Thus, the appearance of the abomination that makes desolate is the key, internationally recognizable event that signals the imminence of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

When this event occurs, it will mark the beginning of a period of unparalleled tribulation for the people of God. To those who find themselves living during this period of great tribulation, Jesus issues the following command:

Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. [Luke 21:28, ESV]
Phase Seven: The Great Tribulation

“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”

[Matthew 24:21-27, ESV]

The Vision of the Pregnant Women and the Great Red Dragon

In a moment we will turn to the 13th chapter of Revelation for the visions of the two beasts, the first arising from the sea and the second arising from the land. However, before we do, we must identify the great red dragon which is mentioned in connection with both beasts. The dragon is represented in the 12th chapter of Revelation as follows:

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to His throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days (= 3 ½ years).

[Revelation 12:1–6, adapted from the ESV, emphasis added]

Who or what is the great red dragon? The Apostle John knew that his readers would recognize this to be a representation of Satan or the devil. The rebellion of Lucifer, who became Satan and the devil, is described in Isaiah 14:12-20 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. The description of Satan as having seven heads and ten horns in Revelation 12:3 is especially noteworthy.

The Apostle John also knew that his readers would recognize the pregnant woman to be a representation of the nation of Israel, from which Messiah the Prince would come, according to His human descent. The implacable hostility of Satan toward Israel and Jesus Christ is powerfully portrayed by John as the 12th chapter of Revelation unfolds.
The Vision of the Beast That Arises From the Sea: The Antichrist

The visions of the Apostle John recorded in the 13th chapter of Revelation inform and illuminate Jesus’ representation of the great tribulation. In this chapter, John records his vision of two beasts, the first arising out of the sea and the second out of the land. The Scripture passage below begins with the 17th verse of the 12th chapter:

12:17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea. 13:1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. 3 One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” [Revelation 12:17–13:4, ESV, emphasis added]

This is how John represents the ruler that will arise in the middle of Daniel’s 70th week – the one who breaks the covenant with the Jews, and who later causes the abomination that makes desolate to be set up in the holy place. He corresponds to “the man of lawlessness” of 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff. Also, I believe this figure corresponds to the little horn of Daniel 7:8ff, and to the Antichrist of 1 John 2:18, 2:22 & 4:3 and 2 John 1:7. In fact, Antichrist is the appellative title by which we will refer to the first beast for the remainder of the discussion in this theological reader.

Figure 9 is an artistic representation of the Antichrist, based upon the information presented by John in the passage quoted above. While John is referring to one or more actual end time rulers in this passage, we must recognize that the word picture that he paints is designed to represent the moral, spiritual, and theological characteristics of this person or these persons, not his or their physical characteristics.

The Antichrist is John’s representation of the false messiahs, concerning which Jesus issues the emphatic warning in Matthew 24:24. The arising of the Antichrist out of the sea in accordance with Revelation 13:1 is interpreted by an angelic messenger as follows in Revelation 17:15:

“The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.” [Revelation 17:15, ESV]
In his description of the Antichrist, John borrows heavily from the visions recorded in the prophecy of Daniel. In particular, referring to the 7th chapter of Daniel, we find recorded his vision of four beasts, each of which represents one of the great world empires identified in Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (see Figure 4 and the associated discussion). The first beast in the sequence is a lion, which represents the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar; the second is a bear, which represents the Medo-Persian Empire; the third is a leopard, which represents the Grecian Empire under Alexander the Great; and the fourth is a terrible, nondescript beast, which represents the Roman Empire. Accordingly, the Antichrist – the first beast of the 13th chapter of Revelation – is represented as a composite of the four beasts of the 7th chapter of Daniel.

The number of heads and horns possessed by the Antichrist is also noteworthy and most significant. The seven heads and ten horns possessed by the Antichrist corresponds to the number of heads and horns ascribed to the great red dragon in the 12th chapter of Revelation and to the fourth beast of the 7th chapter of Daniel. This same configuration of heads and horns reappears in the 17th chapter of Revelation in connection with the great scarlet beast, which is
ridden by the woman who represents Babylon the Great. It is in this context that an explanation of
the heads and horns is furnished as follows:

Then the angel said to me, “Why are you astonished? I will tell you the secret
meaning of the woman and of the beast, with the seven heads and the 10 horns, that
carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up from the
abyss and go to destruction... Here is the mind with wisdom: The seven heads are
seven mountains on which the woman is seated. They are also seven kings: Five
have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes, he must remain
for a little while. The beast that was and is not, is himself an eighth king, yet he
belongs to the seven and is going to destruction. The 10 horns you saw are 10 kings
who have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority as kings with the
beast for one hour. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority
to the beast. These will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them
because He is Lord of lords and King of kings. Those with Him are called, chosen,
and faithful.” [Revelation 17:7–14, HCSB]

Note the 3rd verse in the passage from the 13th chapter of Revelation which is quoted above. In
this verse, John records the vision of seeing “one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal
wound was healed.” In other words, the Antichrist will be enabled, by the power of Satan, to
emulate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This deceptive, satanically induced miracle
will motivate people to worship the Antichrist.

Turning to John’s continuing representation of the Antichrist,

A mouth was given to him to speak boasts and blasphemies. He was also given
authority to act for 42 months (= 3 ½ years). He began to speak blasphemies against
God: to blaspheme His name and His dwelling – those who dwell in heaven. And he
was permitted to wage war against the saints and to conquer them. He was also given
authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. All those who live on the
earth will worship him, everyone whose name was not written from the foundation of
the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered. If anyone has an ear,
he should listen: If anyone is destined for captivity, into captivity he goes. If anyone is
to be killed with a sword, with a sword he will be killed. This demands the
perseverance and faith of the saints. [Revelation 13:5-10, HCSB]

Evidently, the Antichrist will have global dominion; in other words, he will be the head of a one-
world government. Moreover, he will be allowed to “make war with the saints and to overcome
them.”
Vision of the Beast That Arises Out of the Land: The False Prophet

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the land; he had two horns like a lamb, but he sounded like a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the first beast on his behalf and compels the earth and those who live on it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. He also performs great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in front of people. He deceives those who live on the earth because of the signs that he is permitted to perform on behalf of the beast, telling those who live on the earth to make an image of the beast who had the sword wound and yet lived. [Revelation 13:11-14, adapted from the HCSB, emphasis added]

The second beast is later referred to by John as the False Prophet, so that is the title we will assign to this person. He corresponds to the “false prophets” mentioned by Jesus in His stern warning of Matthew 24:24. The fact that this beast arises out of the earth or land probably indicates that he will be a Jew.

Turning to John’s continuing representation of the False Prophet,

He was permitted to give a spirit to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could both speak and cause whoever would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he requires everyone – small and great, rich and poor, free and slave – to be given a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark: the beast’s name or the number of his name. Here is wisdom: The one who has understanding must calculate the number of the beast, because it is the number of a man. His number is 666. [Revelation 13:15-18, HCSB, emphasis added]

Note that the image of the Antichrist that the False Prophet will cause to be constructed is a lethal robot which will have the power to speak as well as the power to destroy any who do not worship it. According to Jesus’ clear warning in Matthew 24:15, the robot will stand in “the holy place.”

This lethal robot is the abomination that makes desolate.

Disciples of Jesus Christ who are still alive on the earth at this time will refuse the mark of the beast. Accordingly, the only way they will be able to survive is escape to a place of hiding with access to a supply of water and food sufficient for about 1½ months. How would the authorities on earth at that time flush believers out of their hiding places? The answer is by announcing the return of Christ. This is why Jesus warns his followers not to heed such false announcements in Matthew 24:23.

The Unholy Trinity

Let us pause to reflect on the fact that the Apostle John presents Satan (= the great red dragon), the Antichrist, and the False Prophet as an unholy trinity, in which Satan corresponds to God the Father, the Antichrist corresponds to God the Son, and the False Prophet corresponds to God the Spirit. Accordingly, Satan will one day realize his objective of being like the Most High and of becoming the object of worship instead of the Most High.

The Parousia: The Glorious Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 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.

[Matthew 24:29-31, ESV; emphasized phrases are quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures]

As noted above, the underlined phrases are quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures. Note also that just prior to the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man a cosmic cataclysm will occur, including the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of stars from the sky, and the shaking of the powers of the heavens.

Figure 10 presents an artistic concept of how the glorious parousia of Jesus Christ might appear. We are told in Revelation 1:17 that when He comes, “every eye will see Him.” How will He manage that?

Somehow His coming will be visible from all points on the globe at the same time.

The first thing Jesus will do when He comes is “gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.” The Apostle Paul describes the gathering of the elect in 1 Corinthians 15:51ff and 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff, and he refers to it in 2 Thessalonians 2:1. After Jesus has gathered His elect, He will execute the day of Yahweh judgments, which had been promised from the dawn of history. The result of these will be that all of the non-elect – those who received the mark of the beast and who worshiped the image of the Antichrist – will be banished into death.
From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that He is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away (= parerchomai) until all these things take place (= ginomai). Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. [Matthew 24:32-36, adapted from the ESV]

The first part of the passage quoted above is clear enough; just as the foliation of the fig tree, as depicted in Figure 11, signals the imminence of summer, so the unfolding signs that Jesus lays out in the Olivet Discourse signal the imminence of His return. However, what about His statement in the 34th verse? What meaning did He intend by the statement, “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” As noted above, the phrase “pass away” translates the Greek parerchomai and the phrase “take place” translates ginomai. Let’s endeavor to unpack the meaning of this puzzling passage.
The phrase *this generation* is a technical phrase that occurs six times in Matthew’s Gospel. From the context of these occurrences, the phrase designates the *generation of Jewish people who were alive at the time of Jesus’ ministry*, ca. 28-31 AD.

“Pass Away”

In the context, I believe *parerchomai = pass away* designates the action of *passing off the stage of history*.

“Take Place”

The word *ginomai = take place* designates the state of coming into being. *It certainly does not require complete fulfillment*, since the *parousia* hasn’t yet occurred. Therefore, given the *context* of the passage, I am convinced that *ginomai* designates the action of *beginning to appear on the stage of history*.

Proposed Clarification

Accordingly, I propose the following clarification of Jesus’ intended meaning in the 34th verse:

> Truly I say to you, this generation of Jews who are listening to my voice will not pass off the stage of history until all these things begin to appear on the stage of history.
Except for Christ’s *parousia*, all of the signs of the imminence of his coming have occurred in history, including the desecration of the temple by Titus in connection with his conquest of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This desecration and that brought about by Antiochus Epiphanes IV in the 2nd century BC serve as prototypes of the abomination that makes desolate that will occur in the last days.

**The Cosmic Secret**

Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:36 is also baffling. How could there be a piece of information that is kept secret in the mind of God the Father such that not even God the Son knows it? Was Jesus speaking out from His humanity at this point? Suppose that we take Jesus at His word. The day and hour of His return to gather His elect and bring judgment to bear upon the rest of mankind is known only in the mind of the Father.

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This is, indeed, an awesomely cosmic secret.

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**The Day of Yahweh: “As In the Days of Noah”**

For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken (= paralambano) and one left (= aphiemi). Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken (= paralambano) and one left (= aphiemi). Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. [Matthew 24:37-44, ESV]

The *day of Yahweh* is a technical term that first surfaces in the canonical writings as “that day” in Isaiah 2:11. However, according to Jude in his short epistle, Enoch, the patriarch of the 7th generation from Adam, was the first one to prophesy of the coming day when Yahweh would bring judgment to bear upon all mankind. From that point onward, the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Scriptures is replete with references to the *day of Yahweh* or *that day*. In the Christian Scriptures the day of Yahweh is transformed into the *day of the Lord* or the *day of Christ*. And so in Matthew 24:37ff Jesus explains what this coming day of judgment will look like and how it will unfold. According to this passage, the day of Yahweh (= the day of the Lord) will be like the days of Noah.
By the way, the terminology for the coming day of judgment employed in the Christian Scriptures is another important example of the way in which the Septuagint rendering of Yahweh = Kyrios influenced the writings of the apostles. It also exhibits the apostles’ embracing of the equivalence of Jesus Christ = Yahweh, which first surfaces in John’s Gospel; it then reappears in the epistles, especially those of Paul.

Returning to our focal passage, Matthew 24:37ff, Figure 12 beautifully illustrates life going on in the days of Noah as the ark was being constructed. Even though the ark stood as a mute but very tangible testimony to the fact that judgment was coming, and conditions on Planet Earth were about to radically change, the people of Noah’s day blithely went about their lives. They did this right up to the day when Yahweh gathered Noah, his family, and selected animals of every species into the safety of the ark. And then He caused the flood waters to sweep away into death all the rest of mankind and every other living creature upon the entire earth.

![Figure 12. “As in the Days of Noah”](image)

A few were gathered into the safety of the ark, and all the rest were banished into death.

The next statement by Jesus which has motivated debate occurs in Matthew 24:37-42. In this passage He asserts that His coming and the day of Yahweh judgments will correspond to that which took place in the days of Noah.

We need to focus our attention on two key words in this passage: *paralambano*, which is translated *taken*, and *aphiemi*, which is translated *left*. In context, *paralambano* designates the action of *gathering and receiving*, and *aphiemi* designates the action of *sending away or
**banishing.** In the days of Noah, *paralambano* represents Yahweh’s action of gathering Noah, his household, and selected animals and receiving them into a place of safety aboard the ark; and *aphiemi* designates Yahweh’s action of sweeping away by means of the Flood and banishing into death all living things apart from those on board the ark.

To summarize, in the days of Noah, he and his household had been forewarned by Yahweh concerning the coming deluge, and they were **prepared**. Everyone else who was alive at that time was **surprised** by the Flood. The entire population of the world **experienced the Flood**. Noah and his household experienced it from the protection of the Ark, but everyone else was swept away and perished.

Jesus states with emphasis that when He comes, the execution of the day of Yahweh judgments will be **just like** what happened in the days of Noah. Therefore, I assert that everyone alive on planet Earth at the time Jesus returns will **experience** the day of Yahweh judgments. The elect will be **gathered and received** into a place of protection, and all the rest will be **banished** into death.

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**The Day of Yahweh: Four Parables**

Jesus employs four parables to illustrate how this gathering and banishing will unfold within the framework of the day of Yahweh judgments.

**Parable of the Stewards**

The **parable of the stewards** is actually not set forth as a parable in most Bibles; it is located in Matthew 24:45-51. The particular category of servant (= *doulos* = slave) that is featured in this passage is a **steward**; that is, a servant who is entrusted by his master with the administration of the affairs of his household during times of the master’s absence. A noteworthy biblical example of such a servant is Joseph in the household of Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s bodyguard (see Genesis 39:1ff).

Two stewards are compared in the parable. The first one is wise in that he remains faithful to his assigned responsibilities during his master’s absence. Even if the master’s return is delayed for a long time, the steward continues steadfastly to perform his duties. And this is what the master finds him doing when he finally does return. As a result, the wise steward is commended and rewarded with a substantial promotion.

On the other hand, the second steward responds differently to the master’s delayed return. He begins to abuse his fellow servants, and he carouses with drunkards. When the master unexpectedly returns, he finds the steward misbehaving. As a result, the wicked servant is severely punished, and he is banished from the master’s presence.
This parable applies to those of us to whom Christ has given a leadership responsibility in the household of God. It is our place to continue steadfastly to perform our duties until our Master returns.

\begin{center}
\textit{Woe to us if He finds us shirking our assigned task when He returns unexpectedly!}
\end{center}

\textbf{Parable of the Ten Virgins}

This parable is located in Matthew 25:1-13. Ten virgins are invited to attend a wedding feast.\(^\text{10}\) Five of them are wise and bring a flask of extra oil along with their lamps, but five are foolish and only bring their lamps with the oil contained in their lamps’ small reservoirs. The bridegroom’s arrival is delayed, and as a result all ten of the virgins’ lamps burn through the oil in their reservoirs. The wise virgins are able to resupply their lamps with oil, but the foolish ones are forced to go to the marketplace and buy extra oil. As a result, the five wise virgins are able to enter with the bridegroom, and they participate in the wedding feast. However, when the foolish virgins finally arrive, they are refused entrance.

The \textit{one thing} that all ten of the virgins were expected to do was \textit{wait for the bridegroom}, and to be prepared to enter the wedding feast \textit{whenever he arrived}. Because his arrival would be on his schedule, not theirs, it was mandatory that they take precautions to be ready whenever he arrived. Only the five wise virgins were ready, and they were able to enter with the bridegroom. The five foolish ones failed to be ready, and they were shut out of the banquet hall.

Some scholars have suggested that the oil in the lamps represents the Holy Spirit, and Jesus may well have intended that we see this metaphor. Assuming this be the case, then the five wise virgins represent \textit{true disciples} who are steadfast in walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh, whereas the five foolish ones represent \textit{nominal disciples} (i.e., disciples in name only) who walk in accordance with the flesh. Only the former are qualified to enter the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

\textbf{Parable of the Talents}

This parable is located in Matthew 25:14-30. In some respects, it is similar to the parable of the stewards. The master of the household is about to embark upon an extended journey, and he entrusts his assets to his servants. To one servant he entrusts five talents, to another he entrusts two talents, and to yet another he entrusts one talent, “to each according to his own ability.” While the master’s explicit instructions to his servants are not included in Matthew’s version of this

\(^{10}\) Refer to the Interpreting Didactic Literature section of Chapter 4 in the \textit{WitW Theological Reader} for a summary of the ancient near eastern marriage custom. This summary is included in the subsection entitled Historical and Cultural Context.
parable, they are included Luke's version, which is located in Luke 19:11-27. While the details of the parable of the ten minas in Luke differ from those of the parable of the talents in Matthew, the point of the two parables is identical.

We are to engage in business, using the assets our Master has entrusted to us, until He returns. In fact, we are to engage in His business, on His behalf, and employing His assets. The commendations received by the faithful servants in both parables places in evidence the Master's performance criterion, which is return on investment. The servants who caused the assets entrusted to their care to multiply are commended and rewarded, whereas the servants who kept the Master's assets laid up in a napkin are severely punished and banished from His presence.

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

This fourth and final parable is located in Matthew 25:31-46. Through it Jesus represents a judgment that He will bring to bear upon the nations (= ethnos) as part of the day of Yahweh. This same judgment is the subject of Joel's prophecy in Joel 3:1-15. In Joel 3:2 the Hebrew word translated nations is goyim, which normally is used to refer to the Gentile nations of the world. Thus, the people being judged in both Matthew 25:31ff and Joel 3:1ff are Gentiles. On what basis will they be judged; what is the judgment criterion?

The judgment criterion pronounced by both Jesus and Joel is this: how well did you treat the Jews with whom your life intersected? This criterion harks back to the original covenant promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse...” Jesus expresses the principle of Genesis 12:3 in this way: ministry to a Jew is equivalent to ministry to Him, and failure to minister to a Jew in need is equivalent to failure to minister to Him.

In the parable, the King will gather into His eternal kingdom all those who ministered “to the least of these My brothers” as unto Him, and He will banish into eternal punishment all those who failed to minister “to the least of these My brothers” as unto Him.

Concluding Comments Regarding the Day of Yahweh Judgments

Through these four parables, Jesus clearly represents the judgment criteria in His administration of the day of Yahweh judgments:

♦ Those of us who have been called to administer the affairs of the household of God are expected to remain steadfastly faithful to our assigned tasks until Jesus returns.

♦ Every disciple is expected to keep pressing forward in his battle against the flesh and to continue steadfastly to walk in accordance with the Spirit and not in accordance with the flesh.
Every disciple is expected to be diligent to employ the assets entrusted to him to perform Jesus’ business in this world in His behalf. And what is His business? It is the making of disciples – fully devoted followers of Christ – in accordance with Matthew 28:18-20.

We, as Gentile disciples, are expected to bless the Jewish people with whom our lives intersect, recognizing that ministry to the Jews is equivalent to ministry to Christ Himself.

Concluding Admonitions

I will now conclude this teaching on the last days according to Jesus with some admonitions concerning our application of the teaching to life and ministry. I realize the picture I have painted of what lies in the future – perhaps even a future that some of us will live to see – is dark and foreboding. However, there is a radical difference between the outcome of the last days for those who belong to Christ versus those who don’t. These two outcomes are powerfully portrayed in the 1st Psalm as follows:

How happy is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked
or take the path of sinners
or join a group of mockers!
Instead, his delight is in Yahweh’s instruction,
and he meditates and audibly muses upon it day and night.
He is like a tree planted beside streams of water that bears its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.
The wicked are not like this;
instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not survive the judgment,
and sinners will not be in the community of the righteous.
For Yahweh watches over with approval the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.
[Psalm 1:1-6, adapted from the HCSB]

This psalm continues a theme that is introduced by Moses: there are two ways, one leading to life and blessing, and the other leading to ruination and death. Which way am I following, and which way are you following? While we may fool one another, when Jesus comes, all pretense and deception will be swept aside, and the true set of your souls – the real thrust of your lives – will be placed in evidence.

The stern warning expressed in Luke 21:36 forms the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse according to Luke. I exhort you to memorize this passage as I have, and make it part of your regular prayer life. In this verse, Jesus exhorts us as follows:
Therefore, keep on the alert at all times, **praying that you might have strength to escape those things coming to pass upon the earth** and to be found worthy **to stand** before the Son of Man. [Luke 21:36, adapted from the HCSB]

I have pondered the meaning of the emphasized phrase. To what kind of strength was Jesus referring in this phrase? As previously noted, one way of escape would be to prepare a hiding place, stocked with water, food, and other provisions, to which one could resort just prior to the great tribulation. But another way, and probably the way that Jesus intended, is an escape through death. I am in nowise suggesting suicide by this statement. What I am suggesting is this: everyone who refuses to receive the mark of the beast and to worship his image will be executed. Accordingly, I believe the strength to which Jesus is referring is **the strength to die well**.

In the 3rd chapter of his second epistle, the Apostle Peter presents powerful teaching on the coming day of judgment – the day of Yahweh promised from the dawn of history. Consider his admonition in the passage quoted below:

> Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness as you wait for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God. The heavens will be on fire and be dissolved because of it, and the elements will melt with the heat. But based on His promise, we wait for the new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell. Therefore, dear friends, while you wait for these things, make every effort to be found at peace with Him without spot or blemish. [2 Peter 3:11-14, HCSB]

God would have us constantly live in the light of this coming day, adhering to His way and serving Him with effectiveness, enthusiasm, and excellence. The time may be short, so let us number our days that we might present to Him a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

### Questions for Discussion

1. Be prepared to share your reactions to the teaching in this discussion of the Eschaton. What impact has the teaching had at both an intellectual and an emotional level?

2. Reflect upon the last days according to Jesus Christ in relation to the events taking place in our world today. What impact does this have on your soul at both an intellectual and an emotional level?
3. Reflect upon the significance of the four parables which conclude the Olivet Discourse in Matthew as explained above under Concluding Comments Regarding the Day of Yahweh Judgments. How would you evaluate your progress in regard to these four parables. Are there areas in your spiritual development that need to be strengthened or improved in preparation for Jesus’ return?

4. What ministry priorities is God impressing upon your heart, in view of the fact that the time may be short?