

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36-44?

### Part 1 of 3

JOHN F. HART\*

1

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 and 25 has always been of unique interest to expositors of the Scriptures. For one thing, it is the only extended and uninterrupted discourse of Christ recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. One might have expected this most extended teaching of Jesus to be predominantly ethical. Surprisingly, it is largely prophetic instead with ethical admonitions drawn from the eschatological teachings. Next to the Apocalypse, the Olivet Discourse contains the most extensive eschatological revelation in any one portion of the NT.<sup>1</sup> Ice remarks about the importance of the Olivet Discourse, "This discourse is so significant that the way a person interprets it will impact his understanding of the rest of the prophecy passages in the Bible."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Hodges states, "without it [the Olivet Discourse] we could hardly understand the other prophetic passages in the NT, *including* the book of Revelation" (italics original).<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, out of the four Gospels the technical term for the future coming of Christ, *parousia* ("arrival, presence"), is found only in Matthew (24:3, 27, 37, 39). Matthew 24–25 has contributed to such watershed doctrines as preterism *vis à vis* futurism, and pretribulationism *vis à vis* posttribulationism. For these reasons, the Olivet Discourse—particularly Matthew 24—is a crux passage for any teaching on the Rapture. Pettigrew's claim is of interest. "[F]rom a negative side, the Olivet Discourse is important because all incorrect Rapture systems go astray in this passage."<sup>4</sup>

---

\* John F. Hart is Professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. This is the first article in a three-part series. Unless otherwise stated, Scriptural quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version.

<sup>1</sup> James F. Rand, "A Survey of the Eschatology of the Olivet Discourse—Part I," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113 (April 1956): 162; Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 34, 129.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Ice, "The Olivet Discourse," in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, gen. eds., *The End Times Controversy: The Second Coming under Attack* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 151.

<sup>3</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet: His Teaching about the Coming Surprise* (Mesquite, TX: Kerugma, 2006), 15–16.

<sup>4</sup> Larry D. Pettigrew, "Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (fall 2002): 174.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Most if not all posttribulationists argue that the Rapture of the church is described in Matt 24:36–44 and that this Rapture coincides perfectly with the return of Christ after the Tribulation period mentioned in 24:29–31.<sup>5</sup> By far, the most common interpretive approach by pretribulationists is to assign Matt 24:29–31 and 24:36–44 to the same posttribulationist Second Coming of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the Rapture is not found in the Discourse whether it is a posttribulationist or pretribulationist Rapture.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, a

---

<sup>5</sup> Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 129–39; Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in Gleason L. Archer et al., *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulationist?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 190–96.

<sup>6</sup> Contra Carson, who thinks that the most common view among pretribulationists is to assign vv 36–40 to the rapture of the church. D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:494. Later, on p 495, however, he acknowledges that many dispensationalists deny the rapture in the Discourse.

<sup>7</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 76–79; Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 209; Ron J. Bigalke Jr., “The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time,” *Conservative Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (spring 2003): 106–40; Thomas R. Edgar, “An Exegesis of Rapture Passages,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis, John R. Master, and Charles C. Ryrie (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 217, 221; Paul D. Feinberg, “Dispensational Theology and the Rapture,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis, John R. Master, and Charles C. Ryrie (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 242–43; Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture,” *Three Views*, 80, 225, 229–31; E. Schuyler English, *Rethinking the Rapture* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1954), 41–55; Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 476; William K. Harrison, “The Time of the Rapture as Indicated by Certain Passages: Part III: The Time of the Rapture in the Light of Matthew 24,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 115 (April–June 1958): 109–19; John MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24–28* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 70–72; Russell L. Penney, “Why the Church Is Not Referenced in the Olivet Discourse,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 1 (April 1997): 47–60; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study of Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 162, 275–85; James F. Rand, “The Eschatology of the Olivet Discourse” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1954), 126, 162; Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus: What You Need to Know about the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 94–97; Ryrie, *What You Should Know about the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 82–84; Renald Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord Comes!* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 178–84; John A. Sproule, “An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism” (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 56, 60; Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1991), 57–65; David L. Turner, “The Structure and Sequence of Matt 24:1–41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments,” *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (spring 1989): 21–22; Stanley D. Toussaint, “Are the Church and the Rapture in Matthew 24?” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 235–50; Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980), 280–82; John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 85–90; John F. Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part I,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (April 1971): 116.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

few, but only a few, pretribulationists argue that the Rapture is taught in Matthew 24, specifically in 24:36–44.<sup>8</sup>

One must readily admit that the reference to one taken from a field or mill while another is left behind (24:40–41) sounds strikingly similar to the pretribulation Rapture described in 1 Thessalonians 4. Then, too, Jesus' teaching that no one knows "that day and hour" (24:36) also seems quite fitting with what pretribulationists believe about the imminent return of Christ at the Rapture. But with Jesus' reference to His return as taking place "immediately after the Tribulation of those days" (24:29), the interpretive hands of the pretribulationist are contextually tied. For the sake of sound hermeneutics that honor the context (vv 29–31), any Rapture in 24:36–44 is best excluded.

The pretribulationist is not opposed to finding the Rapture in Matt 24:36–44 *per se*. The truth of the Rapture is established as valid on the basis of other passages, even on the teachings of Jesus as recorded in one of the Gospels (John 14:3). If the Rapture is being taught in vv 36–44, the fundamental challenge is to demonstrate contextually how 24:29–31 can refer to the posttribulation Second Coming of Christ, while 24:36–44 can depict the pretribulation Rapture of the church. This series of articles will attempt to meet that challenge.

## II. AN OVERVIEW OF MATTHEW 24:3–35

### A. THE NATURE OF THE DISCIPLES' QUESTIONS

Jesus' movement from the temple takes Him to the Mount of Olives where the disciples privately ask Him the questions that form the immediate occasion for the Olivet Discourse (24:3). Basically, two questions<sup>9</sup> are asked: 1) when will "these things" take

---

<sup>8</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio: Ariel Press, 1982), 446–47; Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet*, 24–32; Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We? Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 105–6, 210–11, 238, 314–15; J. F. Strombeck, *First the Rapture* (Moline, IL: Strombeck Agency, 1950), 68–71; Ray C. Stedman, *What on Earth's Going to Happen?* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, G/L Publications, 1970), 130–43. Beechick understands the Discourse as a double reference, applying to both tribulation saints and the church. Allen Beechick, *The Pretribulation Rapture* (Denver: Accent Books, 1980), 231–68. Wood states that the Discourse implies the rapture in 24:42–44 and that Jesus' language has an unusual similarity to other passages on the pretribulation rapture. Leon J. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events: An Introductory Survey of Last-Day Events* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 91.

<sup>9</sup> Some writers hold that three questions are addressed. John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 182; Randall Price, *The Coming Last Days Temple* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 280; Glasscock, *Matthew*, 461, 463; W. K. Price, *Jesus' Prophetic Sermon: The Olivet Key to Israel, the Church, and the Nations* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 280. Rand ("Olivet Discourse," 213), following Lewis Sperry Chafer (*Systematic Theology*, 8 vols., [reprint, Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978], 5:119),

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

place? and 2) “what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” The Greek grammar by itself is not conclusive in suggesting that the last two clauses of the disciples’ questions are a single, unified question. Nevertheless, the *Parousia* and the consummation of the age are a reference to the same event and are identified by one sign (*to sēmeion*). The disciples were asking for a single sign that would identify Jesus’ future appearance and the end of history.

While the disciples’ question may be divided into parts, they understood the answer to their questions as a single complex event rather than distinctively separate events. Most commentators agree that in the mind of the disciples, the destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem, and the *Parousia*/consummation of the age were closely associated events.<sup>10</sup> This perspective may have been based on Zech 14:1–11.<sup>11</sup> The plural form, *tauta* (“these things,” v 3), could also connote a complex web of contemporaneous events involving the destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem, and the *Parousia*/consummation,<sup>12</sup> and not merely the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In the Matthean context, the disciples’ use of “these things” gathered into one thought the temple’s destruction (“your house is being left to you desolate!” 23:38) and Christ’s Second Coming (“you will not see Me until ...,” 23:39). The New English Translation notes on Matt 24:3 state, “Because the phrase *these things* is plural, more than the temple’s destruction is in view. The question may presuppose that such a catastrophe signals the end” (*italics original*).<sup>13</sup>

---

claims that the word “sign” should be supplied in the last phrase so that the second and third questions refer to two different signs. The sign of the *Parousia* is answered in v 30 and the sign of the “end of the age” is described in v 15.

<sup>10</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, “St. Mark 13,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953): 195–96; Carson, “Matthew,” 8:495, 497; Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 525; Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 688; Ray Summers, “Matthew 24–25; An Exposition,” *Review and Expositor* 59 (1962): 504. This was the current Jewish perspective. Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 12; Moo, “Posttribulation Rapture,” 191. Fuller cites intertestamental literature to the same effect (*Testament of Levi* 14:1; 15:1; *Apocalypse of Baruch* 27:128:7). George C. Fuller, “The Structure of the Olivet Discourse” (Th.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1964), 69–71.

<sup>11</sup> Contra Nelson, who holds that the disciples were misguided and Jesus was correcting their ignorance. Neil D. Nelson Jr., “‘This Generation’ in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (September 1996): 384.

<sup>12</sup> Carson, “Matthew,” 495; Ronnie George Woolery, “The Olivet Discourse in Light of Present-Day Expectations of the *Parousia*” (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), 13; Fuller, “Olivet Discourse,” 71.

<sup>13</sup> New English Translation notes on Matt 24:3 available from <http://www.bible.org/netbible/index.htm>; Internet; accessed October 2007.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## B. DID JESUS ANSWER THE DISCIPLES' FIRST QUESTION?

A common dispensational approach to the Discourse is that Jesus did not answer the first of the disciples' two (or three) questions in Matt 24:3.<sup>14</sup> Despite the use of the plural *tauta* ("these things") in v 3, the conviction of these scholars is that the first question regards the AD 70 event. Therefore, if the first question goes unanswered by Christ—a question about AD 70—an eschatological interpretation to the Discourse is verified.

As is universally agreed, according to Luke 21:12–24 Jesus did address the AD 70 event on the same historical occasion as Matthew 24–25. Jesus did not sidestep the question of the disciples concerning the temple's destruction. Nor did He correct the disciples' thinking that the devastations coming to Jerusalem and its temple would take place before the end of the age. In Luke 21:8–11, Jesus first detailed the events that begin the seventieth seven of Daniel.<sup>15</sup> But at Luke 21:12 with the words, "But *before* all these things ..." (italics added), a transition is made by Jesus to events that precede the Tribulation period. Therefore, the destruction of the city and temple would take place sometime prior to the catastrophes of the future Tribulation period. But how long before the end time events is not specified by the Lord.<sup>16</sup>

McClain offers a satisfying explanation for the relationship of the destruction of the temple to the end of the age. "In conformity with the general method of predictive prophecy, our Lord pictured together future events which would be outrolled separately in their historical fulfillment. This method is not something wholly arbitrary but has a gracious purpose. Within certain limits, it leaves room in history for the interplay of both divine sovereignty and human freedom. The future event is always certain, but the time element (with certain important exceptions) has elasticity. This is particularly true of the present church age. Thus, it should not be surprising to find interpreters confusing the destruction of Jerusalem with the end of the age. For, viewed from the standpoint of Jewish opportunity and responsibility, the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70 might have led directly to the end of the age, as we shall see in considering the Book of Acts."<sup>17</sup> Hodges maintains the same viewpoint. "The destruction of the Temple *could have been* part of the

---

<sup>14</sup> John F. Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part II: Prophecies Fulfilled in the Present Age," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (July 1971): 207; Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 435; Ice, "The Olivet Discourse," 159, 161, 163; Price, *Coming Last Days Temple*, 280. But Hagner (a nondispensationalist) also holds the same view. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 688.

<sup>15</sup> This description in Luke parallels Matt 24:4–8. See the discussion below on why the latter verses are a reference to Daniel's seventieth seven.

<sup>16</sup> Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet*, 17–18.

<sup>17</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), 365–66.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

end times, because the kingdom of God is re-offered to Israel in Acts (see Acts 1:6–7; 3:19–26)” (italics original).<sup>18</sup>

Yet it is true that in the Olivet Discourse Jesus does not take up the AD 70 event. However, this does not necessitate that the first question of the disciples remains unanswered in the Discourse.<sup>19</sup> Contrarily, it is likely that Jesus answered both questions of Matt 24:3, but in reverse order. From a literary point of view, Matthew structures these as a chiasm. It is well known that Matthew brings order and precision to his Gospel.<sup>20</sup> Chiastic structures in Matthew are quite common<sup>21</sup> and are fully appropriate in light of his precision. The chiasm in Matt 24:3–44 is as follows:

A<sup>1</sup> Question: “When will these things happen?” (v 3a)

B<sup>1</sup> Question: “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (v 3b)

B<sup>2</sup> Answer: “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (vv 4–35)

A<sup>2</sup> Answer: “When will these things happen?” (vv 36–44)<sup>22</sup>

The second question of the disciples is answered first. The use of *sēmeion* (“sign”) in v 30 together with “and they will see” (*kai ipsontai*) does seem unavoidably the primary answer to the question of the disciples for the sign (*sēmeion*) of His coming. But undoubtedly the central force of 24:15 to the 15–28 unit, together with *hotan oun idēte* (“therefore, whenever you see”), makes the abomination of desolation a potential sign. And if vv 15–28 are eschatological in scope and immediately precede the Second Coming of Christ (vv 29–31), v 15 outlines a sign of the consummation of the age.

---

<sup>18</sup> Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Carson asks why Matthew retains the first question if Jesus does not answer it. He also argues that Jesus' answer is opaque or even deceptive if it does not interact with the disciples' question. Carson, “Matthew,” 494–95.

<sup>20</sup> Ellis calls the author “meticulous Matthew,” suggesting his precision is similar to the precision of a Swiss watch; Peter F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and Message* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1974), 19. See also Donald Senior, *What Are They Saying about Matthew?* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 22. One example is the orderly arrangement of the genealogy in chapter 1, which strikes the reader almost immediately.

<sup>21</sup> Gary W. Derickson, “Matthew's Chiastic Structure and Its Dispensational Implications,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (October–December 2006): 423–37. Chiasmus is seen in the Sermon on the Mount by Michael D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), 250–69. For chiasmus throughout the entire Gospel, see Ellis, *Matthew*, 10–13; J. C. Fenton, “Inclusio and Chiasmus in Matthew,” *Studia Evangelica IV* (1957): 174–79.

<sup>22</sup> Since in the Discourse four extended parables (24:45–51; 25:1–13, 14–30, 31–46) follow 24:44, a natural division can be made between vv 44 and 45. See also the quotation in the text at note 62 below.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## C. DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH SEVEN AND MATTHEW 24:4–31

From the inception of the Discourse at 24:3, Matthew depicts the future seventieth “seven” (“week”) of Daniel 9:24–27. In vv 4–14, the Lord surveys the entire seven-year tribulation period. It should not be surprising that the Discourse, right from its start, focuses on the seventieth seven of Daniel. First, Daniel is the only OT prophet specifically mentioned in the entire Discourse (Matt 24:15).<sup>23</sup> Jesus is likely citing Daniel 9:27<sup>24</sup> as a chronological key to identifying the end time events He describes in the Discourse. We should suspect that much more of Jesus’ Discourse has Daniel as its background,<sup>25</sup> especially the prophet’s seventieth seven. This is also implied by the exhortation, “Let the reader understand” (v 15).<sup>26</sup> Since both Mark (13:14) and Matthew record this statement, it is more likely a part of the words of Jesus instructing the listeners with regard to the reading of Daniel than a remark by Matthew and Mark concerning the reading of their respective Gospels. Daniel is replete with terminology and comments about understanding and wisdom.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps this is picked up elsewhere in the Discourse (cf. *phronimos*, “wise,” in Matt 24:45; 25:2, 4, 8–9). Further, the word *anaginōskō* (“read”) is used elsewhere for the reading of the OT, even when no scriptural text is mentioned (e.g., Mark 2:25).<sup>28</sup> Since the Book of Daniel is specifically mentioned in the verse, a reference

---

<sup>23</sup> Daniel is numbered among an elite group of seven OT authors mentioned by name in the NT: the others are Moses, David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea, and Joel.

<sup>24</sup> Beda Rigaux, “ΒΑΕΛΥΤΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΠΗΜΩΣΕΩΣ,” *Biblica* 40 (1959): 678–79; Desmond Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), 153–54.

<sup>25</sup> The Discourse makes an extensive use of the title, “Son of Man” (Matt 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31). “The title ‘Son of man’ is never associated with the human nature of our Lord, but with the place of His fulfillment of the OT expectations of the ‘latter days’ and the ‘day of God.’” William White Jr, “Wrath,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 5:994. A common understanding is to see Daniel 7 as the primary source behind the title “Son of Man.” Richard N. Longenecker, “‘Son of Man’ as a Self-Designation of Jesus,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (summer 1969): 156; Richard N. Longenecker, “‘Son of Man’ Imagery: Some Implications for Theology and Discipleship,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (winter 1975): 10–11; David L. Turner, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 11:316. Keener adds other references to Daniel in Matthew 24, such as the temple’s destruction (Dan 9:27), the reference to rumors of war (Dan 11:44), and the tribulation (Dan 12:1). Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 573.

<sup>26</sup> Gundry holds that Dan 12:9–10 is the primary reference behind the command to let the reader understand. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982, 1994), 481.

<sup>27</sup> As an example, *hokmā* (“wisdom”) occurs 10 times; *bîn* (“understanding”) occurs 29 times; *sākal* (“insight”) occurs 29 times; *tōā’am* (“discretion”) occurs 12 times; and *yāda* (“know”) is used 43 times. *bîn*, *sākal*, and *yāda* are used a total of 4 times in Dan 9:23, 25—the immediately preceding verses to Dan 9:27.

<sup>28</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste, ed. Raymond O. Zorn (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 532 n. 81.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

to the reading of Daniel is natural. Jesus was appealing to His listeners to gain wisdom and understanding about His Olivet prophecy from a background reading of Daniel.

Second, Jesus' use in v 8 of *ōdin* ("birth pains"), a technical term for the future day of the Lord,<sup>29</sup> also supports the interpretation that Daniel's seventieth seven is the central concern beginning at 24:4. It should be noted that the future day of the Lord must begin prior to a final conflict at the close of or immediately after the Tribulation.<sup>30</sup> Thomas writes,

By using 'day of the Lord' terminology to describe the Great Tribulation, Christ includes the Tribulation within the day of the Lord (cf. Matt 24:21 with Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; Joel 2:2). This time of trial at the outset of the earthly day of the Lord will thus not be brief, but comparable to a woman's labor before giving birth to a child (Isa 13:8; 26:17–19; 66:7ff.).... Armageddon and the series of tribulation visitations prior to it are inseparable from each other (Rev 6–19). If Christ's triumphant return to earth (Rev 19:11–21) is part of the day of the Lord, as all admit, so special divine dealings preparatory to it must also be part of it. God's eschatological wrath is a unit. It is quite arbitrary to hypothesize two kinds of future wrath, one prior to the day of the Lord and another within it (cf. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 46, 54).<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Jesus' reference to "these things" (*tauta*) in v 8 ("all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs") picks up the term used by the disciples (v 3) and fills the term with a perspective that reflects the seventieth seven of Daniel.

---

<sup>29</sup> Showers, *Maranatha*, 23–25. The use of the term "birth pains" (*ōdin*) seems to rule out perspectives that regard vv 4–14 or vv 4–8 as being fulfilled in the present church age. Additionally, the perspective excludes the direct involvement of Jewish believers in Israel: "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened ..." (24:6). Perhaps because Israel will be protected from invasion by the corrupt treaty described in Dan 9:27, Israel will not be at war during the first half of Daniel's seventieth seven. They will only "hear" of these wars. Others who understand the future seventieth "seven" of Daniel 9 to be the exclusive purview of Matt 24:4–28 are Barbieri, "Matthew," 76; Benware, *End Times Prophecy*, 318; Ice, "Olivet Discourse," 166–67; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 279; Robert L. Thomas, "Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul's Thessalonian Epistles," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (fall 2002): 193; Ron Bigalke, "The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time," *Conservative Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (spring 2003): 120–23.

<sup>30</sup> Contra Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 77, 95.

<sup>31</sup> Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 2:281.



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Third, in 1 Thess 5:2–3 Paul used the same Greek word (*ōdin*, “birth pangs”) to describe the future day of the Lord. It is doubtful that the word would be used two different ways in similar eschatological contexts.

Fourth, the second seal (peace taken from the earth; Rev 6:3–4), the third seal (famine; Rev 6:5–6), and the fourth seal (massive deaths; Rev 6:7–8) judgments of Revelation 6 parallel Matt 24:5–8.<sup>32</sup> Since the seal judgments take place in the first half of the Tribulation (and probably into the second half), then Matt 24:4–8 also takes place within this time frame.<sup>33</sup>

Concerning the first half of the Tribulation, Jesus instructs Jewish believers in Israel not to be frightened (v 6). But in the second half of the Tribulation, He instructs them to flee (v 16) because of persecution that arises as a result of the abomination of desolation (v 15). Therefore, the *tote* (“then”) of v 9 is best understood as a transition to the second half of the Tribulation when Jewish believers will be hated by all nations. Verses 9–14 reach the climax of the Tribulation as indicated by the phrase “and then the end [*to telos*] will come” (v 14).

By the literary device of recapitulation, 24:15 returns to the midpoint of the Tribulation. As is common in premillennial exegesis, the abomination of desolation refers to the future desecration of the rebuilt Jerusalem temple by the Beast of Revelation 13. This marks the middle of the seventieth seven (week) of Daniel 9. Additionally, Jesus’ teaching that “there will be a great Tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will” (v 21) identifies the Great Tribulation as within the day of the Lord.<sup>34</sup> The phrase, “*immediately* [*eutheōs*, italics added] after the Tribulation” (v 29), helps establish the eschatological purview of the 4–28 unit by eliminating any potential time gap between vv 4–28 and v 29. This makes impossible any interpretation that would understand 4–28 as the AD 70 event, but 29–31 as the Second Coming.

---

<sup>32</sup> If the first seal judgment (Rev 6:1–2) is the Antichrist or Beast of Revelation 13, then an additional parallel exists between the seal judgments and Matt 24:4–8. But that the conqueror of the first seal judgment is Christ rather than Antichrist is more probable. Cf. Zane C. Hodges, “The First Horseman of the Apocalypse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119 (October-December 1962): 324–34.

<sup>33</sup> Turner, a pretribulationist, holds that Matt 24:4–14 focuses on the present age. As a result, he reasons, “If the view presented here is correct, these horsemen also portray events that typify the church’s present experience in the world, not the final days of tribulation at the end of the age.” Turner, “Gospel of Matthew,” 310.

<sup>34</sup> “Since there can only be one unparalleled time of trouble, and since that unparalleled time of trouble is identified with all three (the Time of Jacob’s Trouble [Jer 30:7], the Great Tribulation [Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21], and the Day of the Lord [Joel 2:1–2]), we can conclude that the Time of Jacob’s Trouble and the Great Tribulation will be included within the Day of the Lord.” Showers, *Maranatha*, 42.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The relationship of Matt 24:4–31 to the seventieth seven of Daniel 9 is shown here:

## III. DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH "SEVEN" IN MATT 24:4–31

### The First 3 ½ Years of the Seven

- "the beginning of birth pangs" (Matt 24:8)
- "that is not yet the end" (Matt 24:6)

### The Second 3 ½ Years of the Seven

- "then they will deliver you to tribulation" (Matt 24:9)
- "and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14)
- "when you see the Abomination of Desolation" (Matt 24:15)
- "there will be a great tribulation" (Matt 24:21)

An obvious climax has been reached in the Discourse at vv 29–31. From vv 4–28, Jesus has revealed the events that lead up to His coming. In vv 29–31, He describes His coming and the regathering of Israel—events that end history as we know it and begin the new age of the millennial kingdom. The outline of events is now complete.<sup>35</sup> But at v 32, Jesus turns His attention to the timing of the Lord's return. It is as near to the tribulation signs as summer is to the spring budding of the fig tree. "All these things" (24:33, 34) collects together the chronological events of 24:4–28.<sup>36</sup>

"This generation" (v 34) assumes the viewpoint of Jesus as a prophet and refers to the generation of the tribulation period, particularly the Jews. These signs and the return of Christ will both be within a single generation.<sup>37</sup> The initial impression from these verses is that once the tribulation signs begin, the Second Coming is highly predictable.

It is assumed from 1 Thessalonians 4–5 and applied to this series of articles that the Rapture and the day of the Lord are coterminous. Concerning 1 Thess 5:9, Thomas writes,

---

<sup>35</sup> J. Lambrecht, "The Parousia Discourse: Composition and Context in Mt. XXIV-XXV," in *L'Évangile selon Matthieu. Rédaction et théologie*, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1972), 324, states, "Everything has now been said."

<sup>36</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 715; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 3:366.

<sup>37</sup> For this pretribulational view, see John F. Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part IV: How Near Is the Lord's Return?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (January-March 1972): 24; Price, *Coming Last Days Temple*, 279–81; Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet*, 23; Mike Stallard, "A Review of R. C. Sproul's *The Last Days according to Jesus: An Analysis of Moderate Preterism: Part II*," *Conservative Theological Journal* 6 (August 2002): 184; Thomas Ice, "(Part 31) An Interpretation of Matthew 24–25," *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, available from <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=229>; Internet; accessed October 2007.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The only way to hold that [the Rapture] ... is an imminent prospect is to see it as simultaneous with the beginning of the divine judgment against earth. Only if the Rapture coincides with the beginning of the day of the Lord can both be imminent and the salvation of those in Christ coincide with the coming of wrath to the rest (v 9)... Were either the Rapture or the day of the Lord to precede the other, one or the other would cease to be an imminent prospect to which the 'thief in the night' and related expressions (1:10; 4:15, 17) are appropriate. That both are any-moment possibilities is why Paul can talk about these two in successive paragraphs. This is how the Lord's personal coming as well as the 'day's' coming can be compared to a thief (2 Peter 3:4, 10; Rev 3:3, 11; 16:15).<sup>38</sup>

Elsewhere Thomas writes, "Both the return of Christ for His church and the return of Christ to inflict wrath and tribulation on the world are imminent."<sup>39</sup>

## IV. THE ROLE OF VERSE 36 IN MATTHEW 24

Posttribulationists and most pretribulationists propose that Matt 24:36 addresses the same event as the Second Advent of vv 29–31. This investigation suggests that while the Second Coming of Christ is as highly predictable through preceding signs as summer is predictable to the signs of the springtime budding of a fig tree (vv 32–36), vv 36–44 present a contrasting event. Verses 36–44 describe the imminent, unpredictable coming of the day of the Lord and the accompanying pretribulational Rapture. As such, the Lord now answers the first question of the disciples (v 3) about *when* the end time events will commence. When the events within the day of the Lord are present, then Christ's coming is near. But the timing of the day of the Lord itself and the accompanying pretribulational Rapture cannot be known (v 36).<sup>40</sup>

It must be observed that more than just v 36 alludes to the fact that the time of the *Parousia* is unknowable. The theme of "not knowing" recurs throughout 24:36–25:13 and is set in

---

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," 2:281. Cf. also Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 230. Since Daniel's seventieth seven technically begins with the signing of a deceptive covenant with Israel (Dan 9:27), some understand that there will be a period of time between the rapture and the beginning of Daniel's seventieth seven. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Is There a Pre-Wrath Rapture?" *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 393. On the other hand, if the covenant is a secret covenant as possibly suggested by Isa 28:15, the beginning of Daniel's seventieth seven may not be known until after the fact, i.e., it too will be imminent. For a summary of views on a potential gap of time between the rapture/day of the Lord and Daniel's seventieth seven, see Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 208 n. 41.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 192.

<sup>40</sup> When Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows," He uses a metonymy of adjunct for subject. The "day and hour" (subject) is put for the "coming (timing) of the day and hour" (adjunct). No one knows *when* "that day" comes.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

full contrast with the fact that the disciples can “know that he is near” (v 33 ESV) according to vv 32–35. This fact establishes the reality of the quandary between what precedes v 36 and vv 36–44. The diagram below presents visually this contrast. Note that five of the eight statements about the inability of the disciples to know the time of Christ’s *Parousia* are found in vv 36–44.<sup>41</sup>

<b>The Disciples Can Know He Is Near (24:32–35)</b>
“as soon as its branch ... puts out its leaves, <i>you know</i> ” ( <i>ginōskete</i> , v 32 ESV) “When you see ... <i>you know</i> that he is near” ( <i>ginōskete</i> , v 33 ESV)
<b>The Disciples Cannot Know and Cannot Anticipate He Is Near (24:36–25:13)</b>
“But of that day and hour <i>no one knows</i> ” ( <i>oudeis oiden</i> , v 36) “and <i>did not know</i> ” ( <i>ouk egnōsan</i> , v 39) “ <i>you do not know</i> ” ( <i>ouk oidate</i> , v 42) “if the head of the house <i>had known</i> ” ( <i>ēdei</i> , v 43) “when <i>you do not think</i> ” ( <i>ou dokeite</i> , v 44) <sup>42</sup> “ <i>he does not expect</i> ” ( <i>ou prosdoka</i> , v 50) “an hour which <i>he does not know</i> ” ( <i>ou ginōskei</i> , v 50) “ <i>you do not know</i> the day nor the hour” ( <i>ouk oidate</i> , 25:13)

## A. DOES VERSE 36 REFER TO THE COMING OF CHRIST IN VERSES 29–31?

If v 36 refers to the same events as detailed in vv 32–35, which in turn refer back to the “coming” of vv 29–31, a serious problem arises for an eschatological perspective of the passage. The problem is as difficult for pretribulationists as it is for posttribulationists. Both groups generally view the signs mentioned in vv 15–28 as describing the second half of Daniel’s seventieth seven. If this time period comprises three-and-one-half years (Rev 12:14) or precisely 1260 days (Rev 11:3; 12:6), a fairly accurate pinpointing of Christ’s return would be possible. Perhaps the exact second would still be incalculable. But would

<sup>41</sup> Not included in the chart is an imperatival use of *ginōskō* (“but *know* this,” v 43), commanding the disciples to know that the householder would have been prepared if he had advanced warning of the coming of a thief (v 43). If readiness is essential for one who might know when a thief is coming (cf. the second class condition, contrary to fact), then readiness is all the more required for the thieflike coming of Jesus that cannot be known (a certain fact). “The householder would have watched, if he had known; the disciples must watch, because they do *not* know” (original emphasis). Lambrecht, “Parousia Discourse,” 327 n. 50.

<sup>42</sup> Nolland calls the phrase, “do not think,” a weaker form of “do not know” in v 39. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 995.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Christ's Second Advent come as a total surprise like the breaking in of a thief (Matt 24:43–44)? The thief imagery appears to point toward an imminence concerning the Lord's *Parousia*. But as Thomas remarks, "If signs must occur before His coming, His coming is not imminent."<sup>43</sup>

Pretribulationists, in their defense of a precise three-and-a-half year time reference for vv 15–28 (the second half of Daniel's seventieth seven), have often chosen to downplay the imminence described in vv 36–44. Walvoord takes this approach:

To illustrate the approximate time of the second coming, He used the historic flood in the time of Noah. While those observing Noah building the ark could anticipate that a flood was impending, it was obvious that the flood could not come until the ark was completed. So also with the second coming. Unlike the Rapture, which has no preceding signs and therefore could occur any time, the second coming of Christ to the earth to set up His kingdom cannot occur until the preceding signs have been fulfilled. When the ark was completed and Noah and his family and the animals were in it, those observing could anticipate that the predicted flood could occur any day. But even then, they could not predict the day nor the hour.<sup>44</sup>

Walvoord understands the Second Coming to be marginally unexpected and incalculable in that no one will know the exact time of Christ's return.<sup>45</sup> Pre-wrath theorists and posttribulationists such as Gundry are not satisfied that the tension between signs (vv 4–35) and imminence (vv 36–44) is resolved by Walvoord's solution. In its place, they propose that the seventieth seven (week) itself is shortened according to the Lord's statement in Matt 24:22.<sup>46</sup> In Gundry's opinion, this resolves general predictability (vv 29–31) and specific unpredictability (v 36).<sup>47</sup>

Many modern scholars take issue with anyone who solves the difficulty of v 36 by suggesting that the general time of Christ's return can be known (general predictability), while the specific time cannot (specific unpredictability).<sup>48</sup> Premillennialists such as Carson and Blomberg escape the impasse of v 36 by suggesting that the events of Matt 24:4–28 span the interadvent age and have now been sufficiently fulfilled. Therefore, the

---

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 193.

<sup>44</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 191.

<sup>45</sup> Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse: Part IV," 25.

<sup>46</sup> Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 108–12; Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 42–43.

<sup>47</sup> Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 42–43.

<sup>48</sup> "Christians who claim they can narrow down the time of Christ's return to a generation or a year or even a few days' period, while still not knowing the literal day or hour, remain singularly ill-informed." Blomberg, *Matthew*, 365. Cf. also Carson, "Matthew," 508; Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 716.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

time of Christ's return is incalculable since there are no specific unfulfilled prophecies that precede the *Parousia*.<sup>49</sup> If vv 4–28 describe the interadvent age and not Daniel's seventieth seven, the word "immediately" that begins v 29 ("immediately [*eutheōs*] after the tribulation of those days") becomes innocuous. Jesus could have simply said, "After the tribulation of those days...." What else could happen between an interadvent age and a final advent?

Other pretribulationists reason that it will be the unsaved of the tribulation that will not know the time of Christ's coming.<sup>50</sup> But v 36 sounds comprehensive when it states, "no one knows." Glasscock holds that even believers of the tribulation period will not know the time of His return. "Even though the Tribulation will clearly be in progress, the overwhelming circumstances will so distract from focus on the Lord's promises (not unlike the despair of the disciples after the Resurrection, Luke 24) that even those who are sealed and who are faithful will not be able to predict His appearance."<sup>51</sup>

Ice believes that v 36 addresses only the time up to the Rapture. After the Rapture of the church, then believers will know the time of Christ's coming.<sup>52</sup> This solves the dilemma of harmonizing v 36 with the preceding context. But if v 36 addresses the time up to the Rapture, then the church is being addressed, not Israel, in the Tribulation. This would open the door to reconsider vv 36–44 as addressing the church, not Israel. But pretribulationists want to avoid any reference to the church in the Discourse lest it lead to posttribulationism.

It is this apparent conflict between the instructions to know the approaching end by its evidential signs (vv 4–31, 32–35)<sup>53</sup> and vv 36–44 portraying a sudden, unexpected return of the Lord that motivates Moo to write:

There is no basis for any transition from the posttribulation aspect of the *Parousia* in Matt 24:31–35 (or-36) to its pretribulation aspect in verses 36ff. Therefore, all interpreters, whether they believe the discourse is addressed to the church or to Israel, face the difficulty of explaining how an advent heralded by specific signs

---

<sup>49</sup> Carson, "Matthew," 490, 495; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 370.

<sup>50</sup> Showers, *Maranatha*, 179.

<sup>51</sup> Glasscock, *Matthew*, 477.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Ice, "(Part 33) An Interpretation of Matthew 24–25," *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, available from <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=236>; Internet; accessed October 2007. Cf. also George E. Meisinger, "The Parable of the Fig Tree: Matt 24:32–36," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 2 (fall 1996): 3.

<sup>53</sup> Meisinger mentions (but does not list) eleven specific signs in 24:3–28 that lead up to the Second Coming. Meisinger, "Parable of the Fig Tree," 3.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

can yet be one of which it is said, “no one knows the day and hour” (italics original).<sup>54</sup>

## B. THE TRANSITIONAL NATURE OF VERSE 36

*The Introductory peri de.* Contrary to Moo, evidence for a transition at v 36 can be produced. If so, then a transition can be made from the posttribulational coming of Christ in vv 29–31 to concerns that initiate the Tribulation/day of the Lord in vv 36–44. When Jesus said that no one knows that day and hour except the Father alone,<sup>55</sup> Matthew records the introduction of the statement with *peri de* (“now concerning”). It is well established that when *peri de* stands absolutely at the beginning of a sentence it marks a new section of thought. Pretribulationists have noticed the *peri de* construction in 1 Thess 5:1. This precise construction is recognized as introducing a new yet complementary subject with the 1 Thess 4:13–18 presentation of the pretribulational Rapture.<sup>56</sup> Although *peri de* introduces a new subject at 5:1, it also carries on the eschatological concerns of 4:13–18.<sup>57</sup> The identical perspective may be true with the *peri de* of Matt 24:36.

Thomas is one of the few who has noted this transition with *peri de* at Matt 24:36.

The (*de*) that begins v 36 must be transitional because the thirty-sixth verse changes the discussion of signs preceding the coming to emphasize that no signs will precede the *parousia*. *Peri de*, (24:36), is a frequent device for introducing a change from one phase of a subject to another phase of the same subject or from one subject to another subject (cf. Matt 22:31; Mark 12:26; 13:32; Acts 21:25; 1 Cor 7:1; 7:25 [sic]; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thess 4:9, 13; 5:1). The verse introduces an aspect of the coming different from the one pointed to in Matt 24:29–31. The verb depicting

---

<sup>54</sup> Moo, “Posttribulation Rapture,” 209.

<sup>55</sup> The majority text does not have the words *oude ho huios* (“nor the Son”). For a favorable disposition toward this reading in v 36, see Daniel B. Wallace, “The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text: A Review Article,” *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (1983): 125. Since the phrase is found in Mark 13:32, the Lord did declare human ignorance of “that day and hour.” If v 36 specifies the same event as vv 29–31, it seems strange—given the chronological details of vv 4–30a that Jesus predicted and therefore fully understood—that He would exclude Himself from knowing the day of His Second Coming.

<sup>56</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, “The Church and the Tribulation: A Review,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (1974): 175. Ryrie adds 1 Thess 4:9, 13 to the list of passages that use the prepositional construction to mark a new subject. For further insight on this construction and its effect on pretribulational exegesis in 1 Thessalonians, see Zane C. Hodges, “1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and the Rapture,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October–December 2000), 25 n. 10.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” 280.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

the coming in 24:30 is *erchomenon*, but the noun designating the 'coming' in 24:37 is *parousia*, a term that easily covers a wider span.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, the "coming" of 24:37 may reference the Rapture, not the Second Coming, since the verse uses the broader Greek term, *parousia*.

Waterman has also observed the use of *peri de* in Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 5. In the latter passage, Paul said that no one at Thessalonica needed to be informed about the times and seasons "because they knew perfectly well that the time of the Lord's coming was unknown (1 Thess 5:1–2). A different expression, but one with the same meaning, was used by Jesus, 'but concerning that day and hour ... no one knows' (Matt 24:36). Since Jesus introduces this remark by the use of *peri de*, it may very well be that Paul uses these words in 1 Thess 5:1 ... because Jesus used them."<sup>59</sup> The parallel between 1 Thess 5:1–11 and Matt 24:36–44 is instructive as will be seen in the following article in this series.

Several other scholars have noted a major division in the text between vv 35 and 36.<sup>60</sup> According to Nolland, v 36 certainly goes better thematically with the following than with the preceding material.<sup>61</sup> In fact, all of vv 36–44 form a well-knit unit. Lambrecht writes of this unity,

The idea throughout these verses is one and the same. V 37 joins v 35 [sic, v 36] with a *gar* and, together with the day-of-Noah comparison, it confirms again the unknown day or hour. Verses 38–39 elaborate the comparison and vv 40–41 illustrate the two possible attitudes that an unexpected *parousia* will then (*tote*) meet with. Verse 12 [sic, v 42] concludes (*oun*) and ties in with v 36: The Lord will come on an unknown day. But v 44 also concludes (*dia touto*) and contains the same idea....<sup>62</sup>

Since v 36 and v 44 speak so similarly of the same subject, he concludes that they form a frame for the unit.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 193–94 n. 8. For further support of the transitional nature of *peri de*, see M. J. Harris, "Appendix: Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 3:1203.

<sup>59</sup> G. Henry Waterman, "The Source of Paul's Teaching on the 2nd Coming of Christ in 1 and 2 Thessalonians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (spring 1975): 109.

<sup>60</sup> Dallas M. Roark, "The Great Eschatological Discourse," *Novum Testamentum* 7 (1964): 123; Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," 325.

<sup>61</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, 990, 991, 993; also Carson, "Matthew," 507.

<sup>62</sup> Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," 327.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

In light of this marked transition at v 36, it is certainly possible to conjecture that the Lord is making a transition to the subject of the initial onset of the day of the Lord and the pretribulational Rapture. Again, Thomas argues, "But in Matt 24:36 Jesus turns the page to speak of the absence of any signs that might signal the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week."<sup>64</sup>

"*That Day and Hour.*" Other factors combine with the *peri de* to demonstrate a change of subject from Christ's posttribulational coming to the subject of when the day of the Lord itself will come. If the phrase "that day and hour" points to the precise moment of the Second Coming (vv 29–31), any reference to the initial commencement of the wrath of the day of the Lord (tribulation period) is unwarranted. However, if the phrase calls to mind the arrival of the day of the Lord as Paul defined it (1 Thessalonians 5), then its parameters encompass the coterminous pretribulational Rapture and the surprise inception of Daniel's seventieth seven.

Brown, a moderate preterist, holds that vv 4–35 are now fulfilled (i.e., they describe the AD 70 events) and marks the future return of Christ at v 36. This is how moderate preterism harmonizes 4–35 with v 36. Nevertheless he observes an interesting distinction.

Such an emphatic denial of any communicable knowledge of 'that day and hour' (Matt 24:36) is in striking contrast to the specific indication 'immediately after the tribulation of those days' (v 29). This is an additional reason why the event referred to in vv 33 and 36 cannot be the same as the one referred to in v 30. Indeed, Matthew distinguishes the two events terminologically. The period of *thlipsis* ["tribulation"] is characterized by the plural expression 'those days' (vv 19, 22, 29), whereas the singular is used for the close of the age: 'that day' (v 36).<sup>65</sup>

While Brown incorrectly applies the singular, "that day," to the Second Coming, his observation of the shift from the plural "those days" to the singular "that day" implies a change of subject. The clear inference is given that a new and distinct "day" is being described.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 193. Thomas, however, does not directly state that the church is addressed or that the rapture is taught in the Discourse. He reserves this teaching for John 14:3.

<sup>65</sup> Schuyler Brown, "The Matthean Apocalypse," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 4 (1979): 26 n. 62. Gentry also argues for moderate preterism based on the change of language at 24:36. Kenneth L. Gentry, "Dispensationalism as a Non-Prophet Movement," *Dispensationalism in Transition* 5 (May 1992), 5:5, available from [http://www.entrewave.com/freebooks/docs/243a\\_43e.htm](http://www.entrewave.com/freebooks/docs/243a_43e.htm); Internet; accessed October 2007.

<sup>66</sup> R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1971), 232; J. A. O'Flynn, "The Eschatological Discourse," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 18 (1951): 280–81.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

What then is the meaning of “that day and hour”? Many commentators correctly identify “that day” as the events of the great day of Yahweh often referred to in the OT prophets, i.e., the OT day of the Lord.<sup>67</sup> The word *hēmera* (“day”) may speak of an extended period of time in distinction to a specific twenty-four hour period.<sup>68</sup> This NT word as it relates to the OT day of the Lord portrays an imminent event.<sup>69</sup> Paul uses *hēmera* for the imminent day of the Lord in 1 Thess 5:4. “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day (*hēmera*) would overtake you like a thief.” Once again, Paul’s use of “day” here is likely connected with the Lord’s in Matthew 24.<sup>70</sup>

A similar significance can be attributed to the word *hōra* (“hour”). While it may be used of a moment of time, it may also represent a span of time.<sup>71</sup> In John 16:21, *hōra* comes together with the image of a woman in labor or birth pains (“Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour [*hōra*] has come”). The following clause uses *thlipsis* (“tribulation”) in the statement, “but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish [*thlipsis*] ...” The verse has eschatological significance since Jesus mentions His coming again in v 22.<sup>72</sup> Of more significance is Rev 3:10. In this verse, where the church is promised to be kept from the “hour of testing,” *hōra* has reference to the eschatological tribulation period and therefore to the day of the Lord.

Beasley-Murray believes that either word by itself could refer to the day of the Lord, but not in this combination. Instead, a more narrow and exact time is indicated, i.e., the moment of the *Parousia*.<sup>73</sup> But if the *Parousia* is coterminous with the arrival of the day of the Lord, and if the *Parousia* does not involve a narrow moment but a span of time (as it

---

<sup>67</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 365; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 378; Ford, *Abomination of Desolation*, 65; Turner, “Matthew,” 319. See the following passages where “that day” specifically occurs with the phrase, “day of the Lord” in the New American Standard Bible: Ezek 30:3, 9; Joel 3:14, 18; Zeph 1:7–15.

<sup>68</sup> G. Braumann, “*hēmera*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:887.

<sup>69</sup> C. Brown, “*hēmera*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:891, where the following references are cited: Isa 10:27; 27:1; 29:19; Hag 2:23; Zech 6:10.

<sup>70</sup> Waterman, “Source of Paul’s Teaching,” 109.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. H. C. Hahn, “*hōra*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3:847–48.

<sup>72</sup> The interconnection in v 21 of *thlipsis* (cf. Matt 24:9, 21, 29) and labor pains of a woman (cf. “birth pangs,” Matt 24:8) makes the unity of Matt 24:4–28 nearly certain. One part of the prophecy (Matt 24:4–8 or 24:4–14) cannot be about the interadvent age, while the other part (vv 5–28 or vv 15–28) about the eschatological day of the Lord.

<sup>73</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark 13* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 109–10.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

does),<sup>74</sup> then the point Beasley-Murray makes is gratuitous. Moore contends that the demonstrative (“that day”) confirms the OT background.<sup>75</sup>

Davies and Allison may be correct in their analysis: “ ‘That day’ is the OT’s ‘day of the Lord,’ which in the NT is the *parousia*; and ‘that hour’ is a further specification that is effectively synonymous.”<sup>76</sup> Yet, in conventional language and culture, hour is more narrow than day. Perhaps the addition of “hour” to “day” (“that day and [kai] hour,” v 36) reflects the suddenness and imminence of the *Parousia*.<sup>77</sup> Numerous contexts require no more than a second or two for *hōra* (“hour”), often translated as a “moment” in modern translations.<sup>78</sup>

All of these evidences confirm the case that the day of the Lord/*Parousia* is in view in v 36. Thomas concludes, “In other words, 24:36 speaks of a different arrival from the arrival signaled by ‘all these things,’ twice referred to in connection with the parable of the fig tree in 24:32–34. After 24:36 Jesus looks at the events of Daniel’s seventieth week as a whole and how the beginning of that week will catch everyone by surprise....”<sup>79</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

In light of these findings, it can be concluded that in the Olivet Discourse a change of subject from Matt 24:4–35 is introduced at v 36. The tribulation judgments that comprise the day of the Lord have been unfolded (vv 4–28). But when will these judgments begin? The “when” question is now answered. Jesus instructs His disciples that the coming of the day of the Lord is imminent. As such, the time of its arrival cannot be known by anyone other than the Father (v 36). Paul’s teaching on the impending arrival of the day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:1–2) is in full agreement with Jesus’ teaching on the subject.

---

<sup>74</sup> See the quote above by Thomas concerning the use of *peri de* at v 36. Hodges (*Jesus, God’s Prophet*, 26) also agrees: “The term for coming [parousia] does not simply refer to an *arrival*. It clearly covers a *span of time*” (italics original).

<sup>75</sup> Arthur L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 99–100. Moore, however, believes that Jesus taught in 24:36 that no one knew the nature of the day of the Lord. This is impossible since the Old and New Testament everywhere describe the nature of the day of the Lord. The context makes it clear that Jesus has in mind the time that the day of the Lord will come.

<sup>76</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 378. While Matt 24:36 has “day and hour,” the parallel in Mark 13:32 has “day or hour” (italics added). This may rule out “day” as completely synonymous to “hour.”

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Nelson, “ ‘This Generation’ in Matt 24:34,” 385 n. 13.

<sup>78</sup> In the NIV, NASV, ESV, or NET, *hōra* is translated “[at that (very), that, for a] moment,” or “at once” in Matt 8:13; 9:22; 17:18; 26:55; Luke 2:38; 12:12; 24:33; Acts 16:18, 33; 22:13; Gal. 2:5. This rendering would not be inappropriate for Matt 24:44b, “for the Son of Man is coming at an hour [moment] when you do not think He will.”

<sup>79</sup> Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 194.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Peter's teachings about the day of the Lord also harmonize well with Matt 24:36–44. Matthew 24:35, with its mention of the passing of the heavens and the earth, has obliquely broached the subject of the day of the Lord. Then in v 36, Jesus mentions the imminent coming of the day of the Lord, followed by the short parable of a thief in the night. It is this thief imagery that forms a central focus in the Lord's teaching in 24:43–44.

Peter also brings together the destruction of the heavens and earth, coming of the day of the Lord, and the thief imagery. Being informed by the Lord's teaching in the Olivet Discourse, Peter wrote, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar ... and the earth and its works will be burned up" (2 Pet 3:10). If indeed Jesus addresses the imminent arrival of the day of the Lord in v 36, it would be quite natural for Him to address the pretribulational and pre-day of the Lord Rapture in vv 39–44. Paul addresses the same subjects side by side, just in reverse order (Rapture, 1 Thess 4:13–18; day of the Lord, 1 Thess 5:1–11).

The following articles in this series will develop the Noahic illustration, the interpretation of those who are "taken" or "left" (24:37–41), the thief imagery, and the Lord's warning to be alert and watchful (24:42–44).<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Hart, J. F. (2007). "Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36–44?" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* Volume 20, 20(39), 47–70.