

## MATTHEW 24-25 – THE OLIVET DISCOURSE<sup>1</sup>

### Matthew 24:

#### GENERAL INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION:

This is the second longest recorded discourse by Jesus Christ. The only one that is longer is in Matthew 5-7 i.e. “*The Sermon on the Mount.*”

Morgan observes:

“In order to understand the teaching of this chapter we must distinctly bear in mind the questions which our Lord answered. They are three, and occur in verse three: **1. ‘When shall these things be?’ 2. ‘What shall be the sign of thy coming?’ 3. ‘What shall be the sign of the end of the age?’** The disciples did not so tabulate their questions. In all probability they presented them as one request, supposing that all these things would happen simultaneously. Jesus’ answer was directed mainly to correct this misapprehension.”<sup>2</sup>

#### EXCURSUS REGARDING THE NATURE OF “*THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN*” vs. “*THE KINGDOM OF GOD*”<sup>3</sup>

“This subject is not worth separating over...but it is not insignificant either. Christ mentions ‘*the Kingdom*’ over 120 times throughout the Synoptic Gospels. The term only occurs once in John (John 3). The Kingdom was the big thing that Christ preached, so we don’t want to be unclear about it. So let’s just look at the Lord’s own statements on it and let them teach us.” – Minnick.

#### I. USAGE OF THE PHRASES.

##### A. Matthew:

- 1) “*Kingdom of Heaven*” – Uses the phrase 32 times.
- 2) “*Kingdom of God*” – Uses the phrase 5 times (beginning at 6:33, “*seek ye first the kingdom of God...*”)

##### B. Mark & Luke:

- 1) “*Kingdom of Heaven*” – Use the phrase 0 times.
- 2) “*Kingdom of God*” – Use the phrase 47 times.

#### II. WHAT THE PHRASES REFER TO. There is a significant diversity of views.

**A. SCOFIELD’S VIEW.** Not surprisingly, the extreme dispensationalist Scofield distinguishes 5 differences between the “*kingdom of heaven*” & the “*kingdom of God.*” This would be a typical view of “*Classic Dispensationalism.*” Scofield says that there is a difference between the two phrases...

1. In terms of purpose,
2. In terms of citizens,
3. In terms of teachings,
4. In terms of manifestations, &
5. In terms of its ultimate end.

**But we are going to find that this position though quite popular, is indefensible.**

#### B. SYNOPTIC COMPARISONS.

1. **Matthew uses 2 synonyms – Mt. 19 (esp. vv. 16, 23, 24 & 25).** Here he speaks to the rich young ruler. This has dialogue has 4 “**big**” terms in it. Jesus uses “*kingdom of heaven,*” “*kingdom of God,*” “*eternal life,*” & “*saved.*” Note that the phrases “*kingdom of heaven*” & “*kingdom of God*” are used synonymously (interchangeably) there.

2. **Matthew and the other Synoptics use the two terms interchangeably between themselves.** (The verse excerpts in this section are NASV translations, from Robert L. Thomas & Stanley Gundry’s “*A Harmony of the Gospels*” (Harper Collins Publishers: San Francisco, CA, 1978)

a. Mt. 4:17 - “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand...*” cf. Mk. 1:15 - “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand...*”

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled by Mike Edwards. St. Vincent, West Indies. March, 2008, revised May, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, “*An Exposition of the Whole Bible*” (Fleming H. Revell Company: Westwood, New Jersey, 1959), p. 420

<sup>3</sup> Note: The vast majority of the material contained in pp. 1-5 is taken nearly verbatim from comments during lectures by Dr. Mark Minnick, for a graduate course “*Expository Preaching in Matthew.*” The notes were taken July, 1999 and transcribed October, 2007 by me.

- b. Mt. 11:11 – “yet he who is least in the **kingdom of heaven** is greater than he...” cf. Lk. 7:28 – “yet he who is least in the **kingdom of God** is greater than he...”
- c. All 3 synoptics: Mt. 13:11 – “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the **kingdom of heaven**, but to them...”; Mk. 4:11 – “To you has been given the mystery of the **kingdom of God**; but those who are outside...”; Lk. 8:10 – “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the **kingdom of God**, but to the rest...”
- d. Mt. 13:31 – “The **kingdom of heaven** is like a mustard seed...” cf. Mk. 4:30-31 – “How shall we picture the **kingdom of God**, or by what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed...”
- e. All 3 synoptics: Mt. 19:14 – “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the **kingdom of heaven** belongs to such as these”; Mk. 10:14 – “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the **kingdom of God** belongs to such as these”; Lk. 18:16 – “Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the **kingdom of God** belongs to such as these.”

**What can we conclude from the above? Obviously the Synoptic writers are using these two terms synonymously i.e. interchangeably.** We have seen five places where this is true (Minnick says that he has found 11 places total).

So...if they all three Synoptic Gospels use them synonymously, but only Matthew uses the phrase “*kingdom of heaven*”, we need to ask, “Why?”

**C. IDENTITY OF THE KINGDOM – Mt. 19.** (We are trying to answer here the question “Why does Matthew say kingdom of heaven?”)

1. Look at **Jewish usage of the word “heaven”** – Mt. 5:33-34. To swear by heaven was to swear by God.
2. Look at **Jesus’ usage of the word “heaven”** – Mt. 21:25. Jesus equates heaven with God.
3. Look at **the prodigal son’s usage of the word “heaven”** – Lk. 15:21. “I’ve sinned against heaven” i.e. God.

**Conclusion:** It was customary usage of the time to use “heaven” for “**God**.” This is called euphemism. So Matthew is using the term “heaven” euphemistically (symbolically). Is there any corroborating evidence for this view? Answer: Yes. How did the Jewish people refer to God? They would avoid using the word “*God*” and instead would swear by heaven, earth, the gold of the kingdom, the gold of the temple, etc, lest they take the Lord’s name in vain.<sup>4</sup>

But... if Matthew used the phrase “*kingdom of heaven*” because of his own Jewish practice, and out of sensitivity of the Jews to whom he was writing, we have one more question to answer: “*Why then did Matthew use the phrase ‘kingdom of God’ five times?*”

There are a couple of possible explanations:

- a. These might be direct quotes of Jesus?
- b. The Holy Spirit may have inspired Matthew to put them in there to make it clear to us that they are synonymous terms?

**General Summary of what Matthew 19 is teaching us:**

1. The “*kingdom of heaven*” is the same as the “*kingdom of God*.”
2. Being in the kingdom is the same as being “*saved*.”
3. Those in the “*kingdom*” possess “*eternal life*.”

In simple terms, “*the kingdom*” is made up of those over whom Christ is ruling.

**III. PUTTING THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE TOGETHER.** Returning to the general subject of “*The Kingdom*” we note three things. A kingdom has:

- a. A **RULER**.
- b. A **REALM** (we will see what it is, below).
- c. A **REIGN** (how you rule the realm. i.e. with a stick, etc).

Now regarding the kingdom, you cannot point to any real estate today! (In the OT it was Israel). **So where is the kingdom today? We ARE the kingdom.** Believers are the kingdom and each of us is a part of it.

**Luke 17:20-21. Here Jesus clearly teaches that the kingdom is NOT external** “*the kingdom of God is within you...*” (Gk: *entos*). Compare that with Mt. 23:26 “*you clean the inside [Gk entos] of the cup...*”

<sup>4</sup> A Jewish young man who attended a number of our Campus Bible Fellowship Bible studies at the Kingstown Medical College in 2007, and who has written me a number of times in subsequent years, will not write the word “*God*” in his correspondence to me. Instead, he writes “*G-D*.” This is, of course, very common among the Jewish people—*mwe*.

**But how do we explain Jesus saying to the Pharisees, “the kingdom of God is within you”, since they weren’t saved? Answer: He was simply saying that it’s internal.** It’s like saying that to a congregation as you preach. It’s not that every person listening to you is saved, but you’re making a general point that it’s internal. This is what Paul referred to in Col. 1:13 when he said “*we’re translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of His son*” i.e. it’s internal! This truth has been recovered in recent times by a second theological group called “**Progressive Dispensationalists.**” (Remember Scofield, etc, were “**Classic Dispensationalists**”). Actually, as Custer has pointed out, others have taught the Progressive Dispensational position for decades before the term “**Progressive Dispensationalists**” ever appeared.

**A related question: “Was Christ preaching a message & a kingdom that was rejected, or was he speaking of an internal, invisible kingdom?”** (The correct answer is probably “*Both!*”-mwe). Someone may ask: “**But isn’t God the Lord of all?**” Answer: Yes He is! This 2<sup>nd</sup> question divides the “**Dispensationalists**” from the “**Covenant Theologians.**” The 1<sup>st</sup> question divides the “**Classic Dispensationalists**” from the “**Progressive Dispensationalists.**”

The Jews fouled up on the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ because they failed to interpret the Bible *literally* (e.g. a virgin giving birth; God bearing a son [“*son of God*”]; etc). Likewise, Covenant theologians err because they don’t take the statements regarding the kingdom and the millennium literally. They say, “*But I don’t understand that*”, and, “*How could that happen?*” **Answer: Don’t be like the Jews, afraid to take things literally, even if you can’t understand it.** (Minnick feels that) making an interpretative mistake on the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ has a bearing on how we interpret the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

#### **IV. SUMMARY REGARDING “THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN”/“THE KINGDOM OF GOD”:**

Almost all theories of origins, etc., try to explain history (e.g. Deism, Darwinism, etc), and almost all feel that there is a purpose or meaning to history. In that regard, the Bible itself reveals a theory, a philosophy of history if you will. The Bible teaches that God wants us to have a comprehensive, concise, clear theory of history. And that comprehensive, concise, clear view of history is...**THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN!**

When you die you’ll see God on a throne. **So fundamentally, He’s a RULER!**

(Now remember, to have a kingdom you need a **RULER**, a **REALM**, and a **REIGN**)

Note **I Chron. 29:11-12. Here is the greatest king (David), of the chosen nation (Israel).** He’s the “*top of the pyramid*” so to speak. Yet David says, “**God rules over all!**” Keep in mind, that’s God’s king talking. So **God** is the king over all. But what about unsaved, evil kings? What did they think? **Daniel 4:34-35.** Nebuchadnezzar was considered in Scripture as the head, the top of the kings of the earth. Yet he too confesses: “**God rules over all!**”

**A. THE RULER: GOD.** Some think its Satan, or man, or whatever. They’re all wrong. It’s God!

**B. THE REALM (i.e. the area of control).** Note **Psalm 2.** This Psalm, which is a comprehensive view of history, asks the big question, “**Is God in control?**” Now what is our experience in this world? *No.* When you look around, it doesn’t look like God is in control. But note what the psalm teaches:

**2:1-3** – The kings, presidents & prime ministers rage against God.

**2:4-6** – God says, “*I just laugh.*” He will install His Son on Mt. Zion. What about the phrase, “**This day have I begotten thee**”? **What can we say about the meaning of this phrase?** Minnick:

“What is begetting, but a bringing to life.” “**This day have I begotten thee**” **refers to the resurrection. cf. Rev. 19:15** (the Son comes to RULE). Compare that with Acts 4:25-28. The ultimate demonstration of the heathen’s hostility towards God was seen when they crucified Christ! But they lost, since Christ arose! (That’s why the Lord of heaven laughs).

**The worst thing you can do to someone is to kill them. But then if that doesn’t work, you know you’re in big trouble! You can kill someone...but what if they come back to life? Then you are in big trouble. ☺**

So in regard to the kingdom of God/heaven, the Bible teaches that the kings and presidents/prime ministers are like horses in a corral. They are loose inside the corral, but they are confined within the corral’s fence i.e. God’s confines. As far as the kingdom of God/heaven is concerned, Jesus is already set up as ruler. But it will be CONSUMMATED (brought to completion) later (cf. Rev. 19-22).

**C. “Where is THE REIGN?”**

**Surprise: Dispensationalism explains it best.** Answer: Throughout history God has manifested His rule in various ways. He hasn’t always used a rod of iron to rule. “*But will there be a time when He does?*” “**Yes!**” During the Millennium. What about today? The same God is ruling, but how? Not via coercion. It is not forced, as it will be then. Now it is voluntary! Some of the horses in the corral are letting the master put a “*bit*” into their mouths. But *all* in the corral will ultimately be tamed (e.g. Phil. 2:9-11).

**A related question: *In the OT period, where was the rule? Israel?*** Before Israel where was it? *Conscience?* Romans 2 doesn't say it per se, but it does talk about the conscience and the unwritten law in the hearts of men. Are there other periods of God's rule (with different *modus operandi's*-mwe)? That's not clear. **Covenant theologians** say that there are just two practices: *Law and Grace*. But that doesn't seem to fit as well. So... let's go back to Matthew. The Jews wanted the king's rod of iron (To smite Rome, for starters). But He didn't come to do it that way, at that time. There are places in the gospels where Jesus refers to the future aspect of the kingdom of heaven/God (e.g. The Beatitudes: e.g. "*Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth.*") The things described there are definitely not happening now).

Satan wanted to be the ruler of the kingdom of God: "*I will be like the Most High*" (Isa. 14:14). If we go back to Genesis we discover that Melchizedek was priest of God *Most High*. In other words, **that's a name for God**. Jesus the Messiah is not just the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Godhead, but the Godhead in the flesh (i.e. incarnate)!

**Today Christ subdues men willingly through the gospel.**

**Later Christ will subdue men through force.**

**The final thing Christ will subdue is death. Then He'll give it all to God (I Cor. 15:24-28).**

Equating "*the kingdom*" with "*salvation*," will affect our interpretation of the "*kingdom parables*" in Matthew 13. Now let's return to the Olivet Discourse...

## NOTES ON THE OLIVET DISCOURSE.

### I. THE DISCOURSE IS BUILT AROUND THE QUESTIONS FOUND IN 24:3.

Minnick comments:

**"Most commentators think that there are three questions here at the beginning of chapter 24** (even though the disciples probably thought (?) that they were only asking one question. **It has also been noted by some that Jesus answers their questions in reverse order i.e. in the reverse order of their asking!** (This will prove important in trying to interpret the passage). How do we know that?

**24:14** – Note that Jesus says, '*...then shall the end come.*'

**24:30** – Note Jesus says '*...then shall the Son of Man come.*'

[Minnick believes] ...that Jesus never really answered their first question, "*When shall these things be*" i.e. the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. You do find the most detail about it though in Luke. Morgan however, disagrees [see below-mwe]

**Here are the questions in Mt.24:3 that Jesus is going to answer (in reverse order) in the Olivet Discourse in Mt. 24-25:**

- 1) '*When shall these things be?*' &
- 2) '*What shall be the sign of thy coming?*' &
- 3) '*(What shall be the sign) of the end of the world (age)?*'"

Morgan, however, believes that Jesus *did* answer their first question, at least to some degree:

"[1], Answering the first question, the Master carefully distinguished between '*these things*' and '*the end.*' The former He declared must come to pass, but the latter is not yet (verse 6). Moreover, He distinctly told the nearness of them. 'Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all *these things* be accomplished' (verse 34). Here again He most carefully distinguished between '*these things,*' and '*the coming of the Son of man.*' The former He practically dated, saying that the then existing generation should not pass until all was fulfilled. '*The coming,*' He says, cannot be dated, for the time is known only to the Father. [2], The question concerning His coming He answered by declaring that when He does come there will be no doubt or question. He ended with a solemn injunction to 'watch' (verse 42). [3], With reference to the third question as to the end of the age, He said: 1. 'It is not yet' (verse 6). 2. It shall be 'when this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all nations' (verse 14). What this may really mean is a big question. Some claim that this has already been done, and that therefore the end of the age is necessarily close at hand. This conclusion is open to grave doubt. Everything depends on the meaning of the words, 'for a testimony.'"<sup>5</sup> Regarding the first question, MacDonald states, "Their first question is not answered directly. Rather the Savior seems to merge the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (see Luke 21:20-24) with a similar siege that will occur in the latter days. In the study of prophecy, we often see the Lord moving almost imperceptibly from an early, partial fulfillment to a later, final fulfillment."<sup>6</sup>[i.e. prophetic "telescoping"-mwe]

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, op cit., pp. 420-421.

<sup>6</sup> William MacDonald, "*Believers Bible Commentary*" (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, Tennessee, 1995), p. 1292

Minnick<sup>7</sup>: “**This is Discourse #6 (*The Final Discourse*)** in the Gospel of Matthew. The basic idea: Jesus *is* going to win! At the end of chapter 23 one would tend to conclude that Jesus & the Jewish religious leaders were at a stalemate (“How oft I would have gathered you...but you would not...your house is left to you desolate...”). But in Matthew 24-25 we learn that **He will conquer Israel! The Jews are going to ultimately acknowledge that He is the Messiah!**

**24:4-ff** – Minnick: “Jesus is going to talk about the beginning of sorrows (“*All these will be the beginning of sorrows*” –v. 8). He seems to be saying that when we get to the beginning of sorrows there will be an increase in what has always been happening... MacDonald: “The second and third questions are answered in verses 4-44 of chapter 24. These verses describe the seven year Tribulation Period which will precede Christ’s glorious Advent. **The first three and one-half years are described in verses 4-14.** The final three and one-half years, known as the Great Tribulation and the Time of Jacob’s Trouble (Jer. 30:7), will be a time of unprecedented suffering for those on earth. Many of the conditions characterizing the first half of the Tribulation have existed to an extent throughout human history but will appear in greatly intensified form during the period under discussion. Those in the church have been promised tribulation (John 16:33), but this is far different from *the* Tribulation which will be poured out on a world that has rejected God’s Son. We believe that the church will be taken out of the world (1 Thess. 4:13-18) before the day of God’s wrath begins (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; Rev. 3:10).”<sup>8</sup>

**Who are the “you” who are going to be “delivered up” in Mt. 24:9?** i.e. who is going to be killed, persecuted and scandalized? **There are several choices: a) Believers, b) Tribulation saints, c) Jews, etc.** However Jesus says they will be persecuted “*for My name’s sake*”. That narrows it down. You can eliminate the Jews because the Jews definitely aren’t hated for believing in Jesus Christ. So does this mean the Church is going to go through the tribulation? **No! It likely refers to the saints of the tribulation period.**

(Editorial note: Minnick does not consider vv. 4-8 as describing the tribulation yet. Jesus says, “*But the end is not yet.*” In other words, Jesus says there’s going to be an escalation of wars, etc., to lead you to think that it’s the end, but it won’t be yet).

Remember, the question is, “*When will all these things be?*” Answer: When the city is surrounded by armies. If you were a Jewish Christian alive then and you woke up and saw the armies there one day, what would you think? You’d think, “*This is it!*” **But Jesus says that’s not the end** (v. 6).

**24:9-14** – This is the first half of the Tribulation, 144,000 witnesses, etc.

**24:13:** “*But he who endures to the end shall be saved.*” “This obviously does not mean that men’s souls will be saved at that time by their enduring; salvation is always presented in the Bible as a gift of God’s grace, received by faith in Christ’s substitutionary death and resurrection. Neither can it mean that all who endure will escape physical harm...many believers will be martyred (v.9). It is a general statement that those who stand fast, enduring persecution without apostatizing, will be delivered at Christ’s Second Advent.”<sup>9</sup>

**24:15:** “At this point we have come to the middle of the Tribulation. We know this by comparing verse 15 with Daniel 9:27. Daniel predicted that in the middle of the seventieth week, that is, at the end of three and a half years, an idolatrous image would be set up in the holy place, i.e., the temple in Jerusalem.”<sup>10</sup>

**24:16** – They flee into the mountains, etc.

**24:21** – There’s going to be “Great Tribulation” (Gk. *thlipis*).

**24:23** – If anyone says, “*Here’s Christ, there’s Christ*” at that time, Jesus says ignore them. Josephus said they did that during the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as well i.e. lots of individuals claimed to be Christ.

**24:29:** “At the close of the Great Tribulation there will be terrifying disturbances in the heavens.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Minnick, op cit.

<sup>8</sup> MacDonald, op cit., pp. 1292-1293

<sup>9</sup> MacDonald, pp. 1294-1295

<sup>10</sup> MacDonald, p. 1295

<sup>11</sup> MacDonald, op cit., p. 1295.

**24:30** – Minnick: **Here is the answer to Question #2 of 24:4. He’s telling them here how He (Christ) is going to conquer Israel.** In Matthew’s gospel Christ has conquered sickness, nature, death, etc., on His pathway to being the Lord of ALL. But he still has not conquered Israel. So, in this chapter Jesus tells you how He will conquer them too!

What is “*the sign of the Son of Man*”? “We are not told what this sign will be. His First Advent was accompanied by a sign in heaven—the star. Perhaps a miracle star will also announce His Second Coming. Some believe the Son of Man is Himself the sign. Whatever is meant, it will be clear to all when it appears. All the tribes of the earth will mourn—no doubt because of their rejection of Him.”<sup>12</sup>

**24:32-35 –The Parable of the Fig Tree.** “We have seen that the fig tree pictures the nation of Israel (21:18-22).”<sup>13</sup>

**24:34** – “*This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*” “‘This generation’ could not mean the people living when Christ was on earth; they have all passed away, yet the events of chapter 24 have not taken place. What then did our Lord mean by ‘this generation’? There are [at least] two plausible explanations... **1) F.W. Grant and others believe the thought is: ‘the very generation that sees the beginning of these things will see the end.’... 2) The other explanation is that ‘generation’ should be understood as race.** This is a legitimate translation of the Greek word; it means men of the same stock, breed, or family (Matt. 12:45; 23:35-36). So [if correct] Jesus was predicting that the Jewish race would survive to see all these things accomplished.”<sup>14</sup>

**24:35** - The Olivet Discourse could have ended here at v. 35: “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*” i.e. **Jesus is saying, this is absolutely, definitely going to happen!** So at this point Jesus has answered the last two questions of the disciples [according to Minnick].

**24:36** - Jesus is warning them of the timing of His coming. MANY have erred by trying to figure out the timing of Christ’s coming. **He clearly warns us NOT to try to set any dates for His Second Coming (24:36)!** So many people have tried to do that and have been embarrassed and humiliated afterwards. However... in Daniel 12 we have the exact number of days listed and counted out (including an extra 70 or so). So *theoretically*, it is possible that some of those who get saved *during the tribulation*, should be able to figure out the timing then, or at least come close. But it won’t do them a lot of good anyway, since they will be being chased, persecuted and killed during that entire seven year period. [However, cf. Shelton, *Prophecy in Context*, pp. 36,37, 40]

**24:36-25:46 – So why do we have all the rest of this material in the Olivet Discourse (i.e. the parable of the virgins, parable of the talents, the judgment of the nations, etc), if Jesus has basically wrapped things up in 24:36?**

**Answer:** Jesus is warning them about *the timing of His coming*. Minnick thinks that you have here the same thing that happens sometimes in regard to OT prophecy i.e. it is written (or stated) as though all of it is going to occur together at the same time, but it may be fulfilled in stages, i.e. some of the events may be separated in time.

Minnick thinks that this section (24:36-25:46) refers to the Rapture, when you compare it with the epistles. However, v. 36 does *not* fit that idea. But v. 37 *does*. **The interpretation of this section is definitely a debatable issue.** Minnick also acknowledges that the illustration of Noah militates *against* the idea that this section refers to the Rapture, since the evil doers were taken away, not Noah! In other words, **this appears to be describing the judgment of the Gentile nations at the end of the Tribulation.** Also, in vv. 42-44 those left behind became His *servants*. Obviously unsaved are not God’s servants! However, Minnick feels that the section from 25:1-ff seems to better fit the Rapture, not the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming? One thing we can definitely say is that there is much in the Olivet Discourse that can be, and still is, debated.

**(Editorial note: I (mwe) disagree completely with Minnick regarding his interpretation of this section.** I do *not* believe that this section (24:37-ff) refers to the rapture. On the contrary, I believe it refers to the Second Coming of Christ. I believe the men & women “*taken*” in vv. 40-41 are taken in *judgment* by Christ at His Second Coming (cf. Joel 2-3, etc). Likewise, the ones who are left are the tribulation believers who managed to survive to the end of the Tribulation [cf. Mt. 24:13]. They will then continue to live on the earth and will move into the Millennium, will marry, have children, etc., etc. It is these individuals (i.e. Tribulation saints) that I believe will repopulate the millennial earth [cf. Rev. 19-20, the OT major & minor prophets, etc).

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<sup>12</sup> MacDonald, p. 1295.

<sup>13</sup> MacDonald, p. 1295.

<sup>14</sup> MacDonald, p. 1296.

## Matthew 25.

**25:1-13: The Parable of the Virgins.** Morgan: “‘Then.’ This gives us the time in which the Kingdom of Heaven will be likened unto ten virgins. **That Kingdom passes through many phases, but just before the coming of the King this will be its character.** Note especially that the ten virgins are required to give a correct idea of the Kingdom.”<sup>15</sup> There are two main options as to the identity of the ten virgins: a) They are professing believers from the Tribulation period, or b) **They are Jews**, some of whom will be saved at the Second Coming, others who will not. I [*mwe*] hold to the latter interpretation.

**25:14-30: The Parable of the Talents.** “Again, to interpret the next parable rightly, we must remember it concerns the *servants* of the King. He has not committed His goods to rebels, but to His own. [*?-mwe*] To apply this parable to all men is to suppose that the absent Lord has committed the stewardship of His goods to rebels as well as to subjects. No greater mistake could be made. When He comes, the slothful and unprofitable will be cast out, not because they did not believe or because they had rebelled, but because they had neglected the opportunities which he had committed to them. How solemn is the teaching of the parable for all His servants. What am I doing with my Lord’s talent? Neglect may bring about awful loss. I may be saved only as by fire.”<sup>16</sup>

**25: 31-46: The Judgment of the Gentiles** [i.e. “*the nations*”]. “The Lord then referred to His apocalypse, His coming in glory. (This) **judgment is not of the saints, nor is it of the race considered as individuals. It is, as He so very distinctly declared, the judgment of the nations.** There are three classes. Those on the right—sheep; those on the left—goats; and ‘*these My brethren*’ i.e. Jews. He separates between sheep and goats according as they have treated His brethren.”<sup>17</sup>

### **EXCURSUS on the phrase “*The Day of the Lord.*”**

The *Day of the Lord* is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. Not everyone is agreed on what exactly the phrase refers to or delimits. Generally speaking, the phrase usually [not always!] refers to the period including the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming and the Millennium cf. Lk. 17:34-37. “**In the Old Testament, the Day of the Lord is referred to by that phrase about 20 times**, often with eschatological implications. In addition, a parallel term, ‘**the last days,**’ occurs **14 times**, always eschatological. Further, the phrase ‘**in that day**’ occurs **over a hundred times** and is generally eschatological. In **Isaiah 2:2, 11, 12 (KJV) the three phrases refer to the same eschatological time.** So there was ample reason for Paul [in Thessalonians] to say that his readers knew about the Day of the Lord from the Old Testament itself. But concerning the rapture there is no Old Testament revelation. This omission from over a hundred passages seems hard to understand if the rapture is the first event of the Day of the Lord, as the post-trib view teaches. But if the rapture is a mystery, unrevealed in the Old Testament, and if it precedes the beginning of the Day of the Lord, as pretribulationists teach, then it is not strange that Paul had to inform them about the rapture.”<sup>18</sup>

Ryrie defines it thusly: “**All premillennialists agree that the Day of the Lord includes the events of the second coming and the literal thousand-year Millennium to follow.** Premillennialists do not debate when the Day of the Lord will end, only when it will begin...The Day of the Lord always involves the broad concept of God’s special intervention in human history. The concept includes three facets: 1) **a historical facet** about God’s intervention in *Israel’s affairs* (Joel 1:15; Zephaniah 1:14-18) **and in the affairs of heathen nations** (Isa. 13:6 Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:3); 2) **an illustrative facet**, in which a historical incident of God’s intervention also illustrates a future intervention (Isa. 13:6-13; Joel 2:1-11); 3) **an eschatological facet** about God’s intervention in human history ***in the future*** (Isa. 2:12-19; 4:1; 19:23-25; Jer. 30:7-9). Only this third, the eschatological facet, pertains to...the rapture’s timing...the question is about when the Day of the Lord begins. If it begins at the second coming of Christ, then the rapture (which must precede the Day of the Lord) could be (but does not have to be) posttribulationist...**But if the Day of the Lord begins at the start of the Tribulation, then the rapture must precede the Tribulation.**”<sup>19</sup>

**Proponents of the post-trib position have a number exegetical problems in trying to maintain and defend their position.** Basically they *must* [for reasons I will not take the time to explain here-*mwe*] say that the Day of the Lord begins at the end of the tribulation. This in turn necessitates that a number of events that normally are interpreted as occurring early in the tribulation must somehow be held off to the very end and the battle of Armageddon. Ryrie comments: “The pos-trib view has a veritable logjam at the second coming of Christ. This eschatological logjam includes: a number of the judgments occurring then; the rapture occurring then, as a part of the second coming; God’s wrath being held off until then; a time of peace and safety; the Day of the Lord beginning with those judgments and yet not including any part of the Tribulation! Is

<sup>15</sup> Morgan, op cit., p. 421

<sup>16</sup> Morgan, p. 421

<sup>17</sup> Morgan, p. 421

<sup>18</sup> Ryrie, op cit., pp. 118-119

<sup>19</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, “*Come Quickly Lord Jesus-What You Need to Know About the Rapture*” (Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, Oregon, 1996 edition), pp. 118, 106, 105

there any way to unravel this confusion? Certainly, and it is simply by having time between the rapture and the second coming. How much time? More time than the post-tribulationists allow for, which is none... In other words, we need as much time as the pre-trib view has.

**“We know when peace will cease. Peace will be taken from the earth when the second seal judgment occurs (Rev. 6:4).** No post-trib scheme that I know places this at the end of the Tribulation. This must occur near the beginning of that awful period. And likewise, the Day of the Lord must begin by that time as well. The Lord taught this same sequence of events in the Olivet Discourse. He predicted that wars, famines, and earthquakes will occur before Antichrist establishes himself in the Temple, demanding to be worshiped. That event will occur at the midpoint of the Tribulation, but wars will characterize the entire time. **Again we arrive at the same conclusion: the Day of the Lord begins at the start of the Tribulation, just after a time of peace and safety.** Paul set down the chronology in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3. Hew assured the Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord was not yet upon them because two things would have to occur first: **apostasy and the revelation of the man of sin**...the two events ...fit the pre-trib understanding of the future. The apostasy is age-long and will climax even before the church is removed from the world. The man of sin will be revealed when he signs the treaty with Israel (Daniel 9:27). The signing of that treaty signals the beginning of the Day of the Lord, and that is at the beginning of the seventieth week, at the beginning of the Tribulation. The treaty will add to the general feeling that peace has been achieved. But the peace will be short-lived...The Day of the Lord will begin as soon as the man of sin is revealed, and that will happen at the beginning of the Tribulation, not at the end.”<sup>20</sup>

**“Pre” vs. “Post” Tribulation viewpoints:** Regarding I Thess. 4:13-18 and 5:1-11, “Post-tribulationists...want to make a very close connection between 4:13-18 and 5:1-11, whereas pre-tribulationists are better served by seeing a contrast of subjects between the two passages. Thus the post-trib scenario runs like this: ‘Paul moves with ease from his discussion of the rapture in 4:13-18 to the discussion of the *parousia* in 5:1-11 because he is talking about events that occur at the same time and not events separated by seven years. Paul’s choice of *de* (the first Greek word in 5:1), a simple connective with only a slight contrastive sense, indicates this close connection...[But] Pre-tribulationists point out that the contrast between the two subjects is sharpened by the fact that Paul did not simply use the word *de* to begin 5:1 but a phrase, *peri de*. This is very significant. Elsewhere in his writings Paul uses *peri de* to denote a new and contrasting subject: 1 Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 5:1. The post-trib contention that the same subject is being discussed in 4:13-18 and 5:1-11 might be supported by the use of *de* alone, but it is completely nullified by the use of *peri de*. So the pre-trib use of the passage is strongly supported exegetically. The rapture is not a part of the Day of the Lord and therefore cannot occur post-trib...

**“Pretribulationists see the Day of the Lord beginning at the start of the Tribulation for the following reasons:**

1. The very first judgments (by whatever chronology one uses) include war famine, and the death of one-fourth of the earth’s population.
2. The only time the Bible mentions peace and safety during the Tribulation period is at its very beginning. This time will be followed immediately by war, destruction, and upheavals that will continue unabated until Jesus Christ returns. Thus the Day of the Lord must begin at the start of the Tribulation, and the rapture must be before it.
3. The revelation of the man of sin will occur at the beginning of the Tribulation, when he makes a pact with the Jewish people.
4. The much more normal understanding of the verb in Revelation 6:17 conveys the idea that the wrath has already come and continues.
5. Paul’s use of *peri de*, not simply *de*, in 1 Thessalonians 5:1 indicates contrasting subjects.
6. The removal of peace from the earth just after the Tribulation begins fits only the pre-trib view. [post-tribulationists have additional eschatological problems that are difficult to answer]:
  1. How can the Day of the Lord not begin with the Tribulation or any part of it, and yet begin with the judgments of Armageddon?
  2. How can the final conflict at the end of the Tribulation be shrunk into a single battle of short enough duration so that the church can be “*raptured*” before it starts (in order to escape the wrath), and yet turn right around and accompany Christ on His return to earth?”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ryrie, op cit., pp. 115-117

<sup>21</sup> Ryrie, pp. 119-121, italics in the original.