

MATTHEW CHAPTERS 24, 25

“Scripture Quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,
1975, 1977 by the Lockman Foundation
Used by permission.” (www.Lockman.org)

Matthew Chapter 24

This teaching was taken from my paper titled “A Verse-by-Verse Study of Six important Eschatological Chapters of the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 15; Matthew 24, 25; and Revelation 20-22,” dated November 1998. Originally this paper was done on a word processor that had limited capabilities (no italics, for example); the original format was scanned into Word 2002 to create this document. All Bible quotations were taken from the 1977 edition of the NASB unless otherwise noted.

Matthew chapter 24 contains some very important teaching on the end times. One reason this chapter is important is that it seems to rather clearly show that the pre-week-rapture viewpoint cannot be correct: The coming of Christ and the rapture pictured in 24:29-31 (at least it has always seemed clear to me that this is what these verses are talking about) take place after the abomination of desolation mentioned in 24:15, which all agree will take place in the (approximate) middle of Daniel’s 70th week. This causes no problem for the end-of-the-week rapture viewpoint, or for the mid-week viewpoint, assuming, as I do, that the abomination of desolation will be initiated about a month before the mid-week return of Christ and the rapture. (On the abomination of desolation, including its timing, see under 24:15.) Once we factor in this timing for the abomination and the idea that the short great tribulation of Matt. 24:21, 22 apparently speaks of very intense warfare that will last only a few weeks and terminate before the middle of Daniel’s 70th week (as discussed under Matt. 24:21, 22), Matthew chapter 24 fits the mid-week-rapture viewpoint better than it fits the end-of-the-week viewpoint.

And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. (2) And He answered and said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” [Palm Sunday has already passed, and only a couple of days remain before the cross. Israel (speaking of the great majority) has n’t repented and submitted to the Messiah. This was no time to fasten one’s eyes on the temple buildings, with their spectacular beauty and glory. The temple, with the city of Jerusalem, was headed for total destruction at the hands of the Romans (some forty years later in AD 70), in accordance with these prophetic words of Jesus Christ. (Also see Matt. 21:33-46; 22:1 -

14, especially 22 :7; 23:29-39, especially 23:35-38; Luke 19:41-44; and 21:20-24.) The disciples of Jesus must keep their hearts fixed on Him and His words—the days of new-covenant salvation have arrived.] **(3) And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately** [Mark 13:3 informs us that Jesus “was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple.” In other words, He was on the western side of the Mount of Olives, from where they could see the temple. This verse in Mark further informs us that “Peter and James and John and Andrew [the four disciples of the twelve always listed first] were questioning Him privately.” This extended passage (Matt. 24:1-25:46) is often called the “Olivet discourse,” based on the Mount of Olives. Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 21:5-36 are accounts of the same discourse as Matthew chapter 24, but the accounts are not fully parallel. For one thing, neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke give us the full account of what Jesus said. (Each of them does some editing, including selecting which quotations to include and putting the quotations in their present formats, under the overall direction of the Holy Spirit.) Also, some of these “quotations” of what Jesus said are not fully word-for-word quotations, which is the case with many quotations in the Bible, and in other writings of the ancient world. It’s easy to verify that some of the “quotations” are not word-for-word quotations (whether in the Greek, or in the English translations): Compare, for example, Matt. 24:15 with the parallel verse in Mark 13:14.], **saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”** [There’s widespread agreement that the disciples’ question assumed that the prophesied destruction of the temple was just part of the events that would take place at the end of the age; Matthew apparently had this assumption in mind as he put this chapter together (but cf. Luke 21:24). As events unfolded this assumption proved to be incorrect. The temple was destroyed in AD 70, and over nineteen hundred years have passed, and Christ still has not returned on the clouds in great glory. The accounts in Matthew chapter 24 and Mark chapter 13 don’t deal at all with the AD 70 destruction of the temple. The account in Luke chapter 21 does include verses that deal with this AD 70 destruction (Luke 21:20-24).

In Matthew’s account “the sign of [Christ’s] coming and of the end of the age” is apparently given in 24:30: “and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky...and they shall see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.” In other words, the (primary) sign they/we are to look for is the coming of Christ Jesus Himself “coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” at the end of the age. This emphasis fits the warnings in this chapter that there will be false Christs, false prophets, and false signs (24:4, 5, 11, 23-27). And it fits the strong warnings in this chapter on the need for all Christians to always be ready for the coming of Christ, since we don’t know the time of His coming (24:36, 42-51). This doesn’t mean, however, that there won’t be any signs preceding Christ’s coming in glory. Matthew chapter 24 mentions several very definite events (signs) that will take place shortly before He comes: the “abomination of desolation” (24:15), the short “great tribulation” (24:21, 22), and the darkening of the sun and moon, etc. (24:29), and there are quite a few less-definite signs of His coming mentioned in this chapter (cf., e.g., 24:14). Also see

24:32-34.

The book of Revelation confirms that there will be signs preceding Christ's return in glory, and it gives us quite a bit of information regarding these events. For a discussion on the signs that will precede the Lord's return, see chapter 4 of my book, *The Mid-Week Rapture*. At the beginning of chapter 4, I said, "I agree with the widespread viewpoint that the Lord Jesus Christ will return very soon, probably before the end of this century." I also said, "If the year 1998, for example, were to come and there was no evidence of the seven-year covenant with Israel, the ministry of the two prophets, the rebuilding of the temple, etc., then I would have to say that the Lord will not return before the year 2000." That was written in 1990. Now we're a couple of months into 1998, and I'm ready to say that I don't believe Christ will return before the year 2000, and He probably won't return before the year 2001.

Things could come together any time, but at this time I don't know when the final seven-year period will begin, but probably very soon. It's worth mentioning that Israel and the Palestinians are scheduled to complete negotiations regarding the final status of Jerusalem, the final borders, etc. by May of 1999. On the seven-year covenant/treaty that begins the seven-year period, see under Dan. 9:27, starting on page 127 of *Mid-Week Rapture*. Daniel 9:27 (NASB) mentions that Antichrist *makes a strong covenant* with Israel. It should be mentioned (I knew this, but I didn't mention it in *Mid-Week Rapture*) that the Hebrew could also be translated *confirm a covenant*, as translated by the KJV, NKJV, and the NIV. On the fact that Antichrist will not yet have been manifested as Antichrist or begun to act like Antichrist at the time this covenant is initiated, see the section titled "The Growth and Transformation of the Little Horn" on pages 64, 65 of *Mid-Week Rapture*. All of the changes I would make in *Mid-Week Rapture* now would be minor ones, like those just mentioned, which include updates, and there are some typographical errors.] **(4) And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. (5) For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.** [Robert Gundry (*Matthew* [Eerdmans, 1982], page 477) points out, that there is no evidence of anyone claiming to be the Messiah during the hundred years between Jesus' death and resurrection and the unsuccessful revolt. against Rome led by Bar-Kochba from AD 132-135; he was regarded to be the Messiah by many. There were, however, several false prophets that arose in the days between Jesus' resurrection and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. (Josephus mentions several of them.) Matthew 24:23-26 warns against false Christs and false prophets who will show great signs and wonders. These latter verses (and 24:11) apparently deal with the very end of this age, whereas 24:4, 5 cover this entire Christian age. (But keep in mind that those early disciples didn't think in terms of there being many hundreds of years before Christ returned.) We certainly have been forewarned; we must be very careful who we listen to, and who we follow, and all the more so in these last days. The fact that men have supernatural knowledge and/or work miracles isn't proof that they are of God. Ministers must be tested by what they teach (does it line up with the Bible?) and by how they live (do they live in line with the lifestyle required by the Bible?).] **(6) And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. (7) For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines [Luke 21:11 mentions "plagues and famines.]" and earthquakes. (8) But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.** [I believe the time period covered by 24:6-8, as with 24:4, 5, is this entire age, up

until the very last days, the days which progress beyond the “beginning of birth pangs” mentioned in 24:8. Based on 24:15, we can safely say that events will have progressed beyond the beginning of birth pangs at least by the time of the abomination of desolation; Matthew’s account seems to picture the abomination of desolation as the time of transition beyond the beginning of birth pangs. (Note “Therefore” at the beginning of 24:15.) I believe the prophecy of warfare pictured in Rev. 6:3, 4 (the second seal) speaks of the same warfare as Matt. 24:6, 7, covering this entire age. Furthermore, the limited famine pictured in Rev. 6:5, 6 (the third seal) probably covers much of the same ground as “the famines in various places” of Matt. 24:7, and both passages probably cover this entire age. (The seven seals of Revelation are discussed on pages 19-24 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.) The earthquakes of Matt. 24:7 also apparently cover this entire age. It’s very clear that there will be major earthquakes in the very last days.

Earthquakes in themselves (like wars, famines, plagues, etc.) aren’t definite signs of the end, but earthquakes (etc.) that become more frequent and more intense, like birth pangs associated with childbirth, can help demonstrate that the end is near. (This is also true regarding an increase in the activity of false Christs and false prophets [cf. 24:4, 5].) We have seen some of this increase in our generation, and I expect there’s a greater increase yet to come. (On birth pangs, cf., e.g., Isa. 13:6-13, especially verse 8; and Rom. 8:18-25, especially verses 21-23. As Rom. 8:18-25 show, these birth pangs will lead to a glorious birth. Also see Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:12, 13; Rev. 20:11; and 21:1; all these verses speak of the new heavens and new earth that will result from this end-time birth. Some of these references include the millennial kingdom under the terminology the new heavens and new earth, but it’s clear that they will not come forth in their glorious fulness until after the millennium and the great-white-throne judgment at the end of the millennium. Also see Matt. 19:28 and Rev. 12:5 on this end-time birth into the fulness of eternal life.)] **(9) Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. (10) And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. (11) And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. (12) And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.** [Instead of “most people’s love,” the Greek literally has, “the love of the many,” but there is widespread agreement, including the BAGD Greek Lexicon, the NIV, and many commentators, that “most” is the idea here.] **(13) But the one who endures to the end** [This enduring is contrasted with the falling away, etc. of 24:10, with the being misled of 24:11, and with the lawlessness and growing cold in love for God and one another of 24:12 (cf. 24:10).], **he shall be saved.** [It seems that. “Then” at the beginning of 24:9 takes us beyond the beginning of birth pangs of 24:8. I further assume, as I mentioned, that 24:15 (which starts with the word “Therefore”) shows that the time of transition beyond the beginning of birth pangs will be the abomination of desolation. The increase in lawlessness mentioned in 24:12 fits well with the revelation of the “man of lawlessness” spoken of in 2 Thess. 2:3, 4. The man of lawlessness (Antichrist) will be revealed/manifested at the time of the abomination of desolation. (See 2 Thess. 2:4. Second Thess. 2:1-12 are discussed in the last chapter of *Mid-Week Rapture*.)

A Discussion on the First Half of Daniel’s 70th Week. There can be no doubt that the abomination of desolation (which will be initiated in the approximate middle of Daniel’s 70th week, about a month before the actual middle) will be a time of very substantial transition, but I believe we can also say that the events of the first half of this seven-year

period will result in noticeable transition. (Many of the details we know regarding Daniel's 70th week, the first half and the second half, come from the book of Revelation, which takes us substantially beyond the revelation contained in the Olivet discourse. The book of Revelation, which was given about AD 95, some sixty-five years after the Olivet discourse, is a very special revelation from God the Father that deals, for the most part, with the last days [see, e.g., Rev. 1:1-3].)

Especially relevant during the first half of Daniel's 70th week are the events associated with the sounding of the first six of the seven trumpets of Revelation, and the three and one-half year ministry of the two prophets. The seventh (and last) trumpet (Rev. 11:15) will sound right in the middle of the seven-year period; Christ will return; the rapture will take place; and judgment day will begin. The sixth trumpet (Rev. 9:13-21) will sound about the time of the abomination of desolation, about a month before the seventh trumpet, and it will initiate the warfare of the short "great tribulation" mentioned in Matt. 24:21. The first five trumpets will all sound earlier, probably all within the first half of the seven-year period. On the two prophets (witnesses) of Rev. 11:3-12, see number 5 on page 12 of *Mid-Week Rapture*. On the seven trumpets, see numbers 6-12 on pages 13-16. (These numbers correspond with the numbers on the "Chronological Chart for Daniel's 70th Week" in the back of the book. I recommend looking at this chart when reading numbers 5-12. These discussions point the reader to fuller discussions of the topics for those interested. These few pages covering numbers 5-12 will give the reader a somewhat brief overview of the last days up until the time of the mid-week rapture. As we continue with Matthew chapter 24, we'll come to the abomination of desolation in 24:15; to the short great tribulation in 24:21, 22; and to the mid-week return of Christ and the rapture in 24:29-31.)

It seems clear that there will be some increase in persecution, false prophets, apostasy, etc. during the first half of Daniel's 70th week, when the church will still be here (before the mid-week rapture), and we have been forewarned; however, God's grace will be sufficient for us to manifest a high level of victory during this period. Consider, for example, the spectacular level of victory of the two prophets of Rev. 11:3-12.

We need to consider why the scenario pictured in Matt. 24:9-13 is so negative. The extremely negative scenario regarding the Christian community pictured in Matt. 24:9-13, and especially the spiritual state of most of the Christians (e.g., "many [Christians] will fall away and deliver up one another and hate one another" [24:10]; and "because lawlessness is increased, most peoples [speaking of Christians] love [for God and for one another] will grow cold" [24:12]) is not found in Mark 13:9-13 or Luke 21:12-19. (Mark 13:12, 13 and Luke 21:16, 17 [cf. Matt. 10:21, 22, 34-39] don't speak of Christians delivering up one another, but of Christians being delivered up because of their faith in Christ. That's a big difference!) For one thing, in the accounts of the Olivet discourse given in Mark 13:9-13 and Luke 21:12-19 [also for Matt. 10:21, 22, 34-39], it isn't just the end of the age that is in view (cf. Luke 21:12), as it apparently is in Matt. 24:9-13.

I can't be dogmatic on this point, but I believe Matt. 24:9-13 tend to give a wrong impression of the state of the true Christian church in the last days (whether a month, or a few years) before the rapture. We'll discuss this important issue over the next several pages. I'm not suggesting that there's an error here in Matthew chapter 24, but I am saying that we can easily get the wrong impression, and that we are dependent on subsequent revelation to adequately understand the details of the end times. Revelation is progressive.

(God didn't just give us Matthew chapter 24; He also gave us the rest of the Bible, including the book of Revelation and many other very important prophetic passages. We need the balanced truth derived from the entirety of God's Word.)

In the days of the Old Testament, it was almost impossible to not get the wrong impression from many key prophecies – prophecies that were not in error – prophecies dealing with the Messiah and salvation through Him. For one key example: It wasn't at all clear, or understood, or (apparently) supposed to be understood at that time, that there would be two separate, and totally different, comings of Messiah. Furthermore, as discussed on pages 347, 348 of *Mid-Week Rapture*, I believe we also tend to get the wrong impression regarding the timing of the rapture from the apostle Paul's teaching in 2 Thess. 2:1-12. As mentioned on page 347, if all I had was Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians, I would hold the end-of-the--week-rapture viewpoint. Second Thess. 2:1-12 (along with the rest of Paul's writings in the New Testament) does, however, leave room for the mid-week-rapture viewpoint, but, in my opinion, it (like Matthew chapter 24) doesn't leave room for the pre-week-rapture viewpoint. When the apostle Paul wrote this epistle, and probably even at the end of his life (some thirty years before the book of Revelation was given [about AD 95]), God apparently hadn't revealed to him some of the details regarding the last days, including the timing of the rapture. As I mentioned, I believe we're dependent on the book of Revelation for many of these end-time details.

At least two points should be made which substantially qualify/modify the scenario pictured in Matt. 24:9-13. The first point, is that the intense trials, lawlessness, apostasy, etc. pictured in these verses are centered in Israel, where the abomination of desolation will be initiated (at the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem). Note that 24:15-22 give directions for those in Israel. It probably isn't legitimate to assume that Matt. 24:9-13 reflect the situation for Christians worldwide.

Now, the second point: I assume these verses apply (for the most part) to the saints (true Christians) who will be living on the earth after the rapture, especially the elect remnant of the nation Israel; these people won't submit to Christ in time to be taken in the rapture. (We'll discuss the gathering/conversion of the end-time remnant of God's true Israel [which includes many Gentiles along with the remnant of the nation Israel] under Matt. 24:31.) I believe it's significant that the extremely negative scenario pictured in Matt. 24:9-13 fits much better with verses like Dan. 7:21, 25; 12:6-12; Rev. 12:13-17; and 13:5, 7, verses that deal exclusively with the second half of Daniel's 70th week, which doesn't start until the time of the rapture. (All these verses in Daniel and Revelation are discussed in *Mid-Week Rapture*, in the chapters dealing with Daniel chapters 7, 12 and Revelation chapters 12, 13.) Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, will lead a rebellion against God starting (for the most part at least) at the abomination of desolation (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3, 4). Many "Christians" will apparently join in this rebellion led by Antichrist, and before that many will be following false end-time prophets. In our day there are many who call themselves Christians (often sincerely) that don't begin to understand, or have faith in, the essential truths of the Christian gospel. They deny basics like the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His atoning death, His resurrection, His second coming, and eternal judgment. I assume that many such people will find it very easy to follow the end-time false prophets (they're doing that to some extent already) and Antichrist.

Antichrist will be manifested as Antichrist at the abomination of desolation (about a month before the rapture); however, his super-evil three and one-half year reign mentioned in Dan. 7:21, 25 and Rev. 13:5, 7 doesn't begin until just after the rapture. Antichrist's

prime supporter will be the false prophet of Rev. 13:11-18. Matthew 24:11 mentions false prophets, and 24:24 speaks of false Christs and false prophets showing great signs. I assume these prophetic words of Matt. 24:11, 24 will receive their primary fulfillment in the activities of Antichrist and the false prophet during the last three and one-half years. On the “great signs and wonders” of Matt. 24:24, see Rev. 13:13-15; 19:20 (referring to things that will take place during the three and one-half year reign of Antichrist, after the rapture); also, 2 Thess. 2:9 speaks of Antichrist coming “with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders” (I assume that at least most of the fulfillment of these things will take place after the rapture).

I assume the apparent misunderstanding regarding Matt. 24:9-13 comes mostly from the fact that at the time of the Olivet discourse the early (mid-week) rapture had not yet been revealed by God. It’s quite possible that even the Lord Jesus Christ didn’t know of the early rapture at the time of the Olivet discourse (cf., e.g., Matt. 24:36; Rev. 1:1). I don’t believe we can clearly see the early (mid-week) rapture before the revelation given in the book of Revelation. Once we learn of the mid-week rapture from Revelation, we can see it quite a few other places, as discussed in *Mid-Week Rapture*. See, for example, the section titled “The Time of the Sounding of the Seventh and Last Trumpet,” starting on page 293. I don’t believe the Scriptures (and I’m especially concerned with the book of Revelation) confirm that the last month, or the last few years before the rapture will be as negative for true Christians as the extremely negative scenario pictured in Matt. 24:9-13. See, for example, Chapter 3 in *Mid-Week Rapture*; it is titled “Christians Will Be Saved from the Day of Wrath.” One of the most important verses discussed in that chapter is Rev. 3:10, a very important verse for this study. It speaks of the fact that those who are faithful to Christ now will be kept from/out of the “hour of testing” that will test those dwelling on the earth. This being kept from that three and one-half year period of testing, which is confirmed by many verses in Revelation and by many other verses, is clearly to be understood as a substantial blessing/reward. We will be spared this time of very extreme testing that will take place throughout the second half of Daniel’s 70th week, during the three and one-half year super-evil reign of Antichrist. Men will have to choose between God and Antichrist at a time when it will be very difficult to not submit to Antichrist.

This reign of Antichrist is a substantial part of God’s end-time judgment of the earth, part of His day of wrath. See, for example, the section titled “God Will Use Antichrist” on page 70 of *Mid-Week Rapture*, and see the next four sections on pages 71, 72. We’ll still be here for a month after Antichrist is manifested at the abomination of desolation, but Satan won’t give Antichrist “his power and his throne and great authority” (Rev. 13:2) until after the rapture, after Satan has been cast down to the earth about the time of the rapture (Rev. 12:7-9; 12:13-13:7); furthermore, Antichrist will be preoccupied with warfare throughout most, if not all, of this one month period.

A major point I want to make here is that Matt. 24:9-13 seem to sound about as negative as you could possibly get, even during the second half of Daniel’s 70th week; and if this is what we Christians are headed for in the last month, or last few years before the rapture, I don’t see that we’re being kept from all that much by the (early) mid-week rapture; I don’t expect the last days before the rapture to be comparable with the day of wrath poured out during the second half of Daniel’s 70th week.

Some may accuse me of wishful thinking. Well it’s certainly true that I wouldn’t look forward to the scenario pictured in Matt. 24:9-13 to conclude my days on the earth (at least not until I was convinced that this truly was the will of God for us), but I can honestly say

before God that my goal here is, as it must be, to accurately interpret, and teach, the Scriptures. Wishful thinking can cause us to misinterpret the Scriptures, and that's a very serious problem. Furthermore, we have no right to modify what God's Word says to make our teaching more popular.

I'm not at all denying the clear message of the New Testament that there will be trials, testings, persecution, martyrs, apostasy, lawlessness, and such throughout this age, and that we are to expect an intensification of these things in the last days. I'm reminded of something I heard at an IVCF mission's conference at the University of Illinois in 1964 (the year God saved me), something that I've heard confirmed several times since then: There have been more martyrs for Christ (mostly through atheistic communistic regimes) in this century than in all the previous centuries of the Christian church combined. It's victory, not defeat, for Christians to die as martyrs for Christ (by His sufficient grace), when God wills it so.

Before closing this section, I should make one last point. I said what I did in this section because I believe it's true, not because I was forced into it by holding the mid-week-rapture viewpoint. You can hold the mid-week viewpoint and believe (as some do) that the days preceding the rapture will be extremely negative. Some who teach the mid-week rapture even believe that Dan. 7:25, 27; Rev. 13:5, 7 apply to the first half of Daniel's 70th week. I don't think there's any possibility they're right in this interpretation.

Discussion on the words "the end" in Matt. 24:13. This discussion (and the discussion following on Matt. 24:14 [which also uses the words "the end"], and the discussions on the following verses) will help explain, and confirm, what I have said regarding the interpretation of 24:9-13. At the time the Olivet discourse was given, and at the subsequent time that Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote their Gospels, it wasn't yet recognized that, in a very real sense, there are two different *ends* for God's saints in the last days, three and one-half years apart. The first *end* comes for those saints ready and waiting for Christ's coming in the clouds; it comes in the middle of the seven-year period, when they are raptured to meet Him in the air. They (we) must endure/persevere *to that end*, as much Scripture shows.

The second *end* applies to those saints who are saved and live for Christ during the very difficult days after the rapture; they must endure/persevere *to the end*, that is, to the end of Daniel's 70th week, or to the time of their deaths (many will die as martyrs). Revelation 13:10 and 14:12, 13 speak of the need for endurance on the part of those saints living on the earth during the second half of Daniel's 70th week. Much of the book of Revelation from Rev. 12:13 on describes the difficulty of living for God during those days. I'm sure those saints will, nevertheless, be very thankful to be saved, even at the last minute, in one sense even after the last minute (in that Christ will have already come, and the rapture will have already taken place, before they are saved). Many (if not all) of them will be very thankful for an opportunity to suffer for the name of Christ, and God's grace will be sufficient for them.] **(14) And this gospel of the kingdom** [The gospel of salvation prepares those who submit to it in faith to enter the coming kingdom. (Born-again Christians have already entered the kingdom in a preliminary, partial sense.)] **shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.** [Under 24:13 we discussed the fact that once we factor in the early (mid-week) rapture, that we learn of from the book of Revelation, we see that, in a very real sense, there are two ends, one for the raptured saints (mid-week) and one for those saved after the

rapture. Revelation 14:6, 7 show that the gospel will also be proclaimed after the rapture, during the second half of Daniel's 70th week. We should expect an intensification of the proclamation of the gospel in the last days. For one thing, the ministry of the two prophets throughout the first half of Daniel's 70th week will undoubtedly enhance the proclamation of the gospel. For one thing, they may announce the events of the trumpets of the book of Revelation before they come to pass (even as Moses announced the plagues in Egypt before they happened), which will make those events more powerful attention-getters. I should mention that it's very dangerous to put off submitting to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If God is dealing with us today, we shouldn't put it off. The more we reject light, the more we tend to go into darkness. It's quite possible that many of those who submit to Christ after the rapture will be persons that God didn't deal with much, if at all, before the rapture.] **(15) Therefore** [As I mentioned, this word helps demonstrate that the abomination is pictured as the time of transition beyond the beginning of birth pangs of 24:8, and the time for the events of 24:9-13 to commence.] **when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place** [The "holy place" is the temple at Jerusalem, yet to be rebuilt. (On the abomination of desolation, see Dan. 9:27; 12:11; and 8:11-14; all these verses are discussed in *Mid-Week Rapture* in the chapters dealing with Daniel chapters 9, 12, and 8. The first two references are the most important and are the easiest to understand.) I consider it probable that Antichrist himself, as he enters the temple to stop the sacrifices, etc., constitutes the *abomination* that will lead to great *desolation*. (See the section titled "The Likely Content of the Abomination of Desolation" on pages 182, 183 of *Mid-Week Rapture*. Second Thess. 2:3, 4 are also discussed there.) As I mentioned, I believe the abomination of desolation will be initiated about a month before the mid-week rapture. This important point is discussed in *Mid-Week Rapture*, starting on the bottom of page 129, on into page 131. While there I suggest also reading the section titled "A Brief Overview – The 'Abomination of Desolation,' the Short 'Great Tribulation,' and the Mid-Week Return of the Lord Jesus Christ," which starts on page 131.] **(let the reader understand)** [Apparently the primary purpose of these words is to exhort the readers living in Israel at the time of the abomination of desolation with the serious need to flee immediately, as mentioned in the following verses. (I assume that it will be mostly Christians who take these words seriously and flee.) This fits the idea discussed above regarding events progressing beyond the beginning of birth pangs, and ushering in the events pictured in 24:9-13, at the time of the abomination. There is no specific information given here for Christians living other places across the world, but I'm confident that God will reveal to us everything we need to know, if we're living for Him, and looking to Him.], **(16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; (17) let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; (18) and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak.** [These verses strongly emphasize the need to flee immediately, with absolutely no delay.] **(19) But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! (20) But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a sabbath** [These things would make flight more difficult.]; **(21) for then there will be a** [I would skip this "a" with the KJV, NKJV, and NIV.] **great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.** [It's very important for us to understand this (the) great tribulation; however, from my point of view, very few do understand it (at the present time). We often hear that the final seven-year period is the great tribulation, but that is clearly wrong;

Matthew chapter 24 shows that it doesn't start until the time of the abomination of desolation. ("Then" at the beginning of 24:21 [and 24:16] refers to the time of the abomination.) Much more reasonable is the widespread viewpoint that the great tribulation refers to the second half of the seven-year period; however, I believe this view is also wrong. For one thing, as discussed above, the abomination of desolation will be initiated a month before the middle of the seven-year period. Furthermore, I believe Matt. 24:29 shows that the great tribulation (spoken of in 24:21, 22) will be over before the mid-week return of Christ. Note that 24:29 starts with the words "immediately after the tribulation of those days," referring back to the great tribulation; in 24:30, 31 we see the mid-week return of Christ and the rapture.

I consider Rev. 9:13-21 to be one of the two most important cross-references that enable us to begin to understand the short great tribulation. These verses describe what will happen when the sixth trumpet of Revelation sounds; they speak of very intense warfare, undoubtedly nuclear (and perhaps chemical and/or biological), that will take place in the general region that includes Israel. This trumpet will sound about the time of the abomination of desolation, about a month before the rapture.

The warfare described in Rev. 9:13-21, which constitutes at least the major part of the warfare of the great tribulation, is a war between nations (not an attack against Christians; this is not to say that there won't be any such attacks during those days); this warfare (described in Rev. 9:13-21) seems to start with an attack against Antichrist and his armies by a gigantic army (it could be as large as two-hundred million soldiers) coming against him. This invasion of troops and intense warfare will certainly include staking out various claims for control of the land of Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple mount. We'll talk more about this warfare as we continue.

The nation Israel will suffer greatly during the one-month period between the abomination of desolation and the mid-week return of Christ. During this period they will apparently be reduced to a repentant remnant, ready (for the most part at least) to receive Christ Jesus when He comes. (See on Zech. 13:7-14:2 [pages 225-229 of *Mid-Week Rapture*]; see on Dan. 12:1 [pages 149-159], and see on Zech. 12:1-14 [pages 221-224].)

Daniel 11:40-12:1 is the second of the two most important cross-references for the great tribulation. Daniel 11:40-43 apparently deal with the preliminary warfare that leads up to the warfare of Rev. 9:13-21, and Dan. 11:44 apparently deals with the warfare of Rev. 9:13-21, in very brief form. The abomination of desolation will apparently take place at the time of the events of Dan. 11:41. The warfare of Dan. 11:41-43 can probably be considered part of the warfare of the great tribulation of Matt. 24:21, 22. Chapter 9 of *Mid-Week Rapture* deals with Daniel 11:36-45. I recommend the reader turn there now; at a minimum read what is said under Dan. 11:40-44 on pages 137-143.

Daniel 12:1 is a very significant verse for the great tribulation. For one thing, there is widespread agreement that the very words of Matt. 24:21 regarding a time of unequalled great tribulation/distress, though not a word-for-word quotation, derive from the words of Dan. 12:1. I recommend now reading what is written on Dan. 12:1 in *Mid-Week Rapture*, on pages 149-151, 155, 156.

Daniel chapter 12 (with Dan. 11:36-45) serves as a very strong confirmation of the fact that the rapture will take place right in the middle of Daniel's 70th week. The time of great tribulation/distress mentioned in Dan. 12:1 will be over by the middle of Daniel's 70th week. Daniel 12:7 shows that three and one-half very difficult years still remain (after the time of great tribulation) for these end-time saints (cf. Dan. 7:21, 25; Rev. 13:5, 7). Daniel

12:2 speaks of the mid-week resurrection of God's people (not that you could tell that it was mid-week based on Dan. 12:2 by itself).

Further rather strong confirmation that the time of great tribulation is over and the resurrection (and rapture) takes place in the middle of the seven-year period is provided by Dan. 12:6, 7, which speak of "the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river." This apparently refers to the Lord Jesus Christ (the Angel of the Lord), seen in an exalted position above the earth (apparently relating to His coming in the clouds at the time of the rapture), at a time corresponding with the middle of Daniel's 70th week (in that He says that there are still three and one-half years to go). And last, I'll mention that Dan. 12:11 helps us see that the abomination of desolation will take place a month before the middle of Daniel's 70th week. To say the least, Daniel chapter 12 is a very important prophetic chapter. (These important points are all discussed in the two chapters of *Mid-Week Rapture* dealing with Daniel chapter 12.) In *Mid-Week Rapture*, there is a section titled "The Time of the Sounding of the Seventh and Last Trumpet," starting on page 293. Under number 10 there, I discussed Daniel chapter 12 somewhat, but that discussion should be modified/expanded a little to include all that I have said in the last two paragraphs.

Revelation 7:14 must also be considered here since this verse speaks of "the great tribulation." These words undoubtedly build on Matt. 24:21. This verse is discussed as part of a brief discussion of Rev. 7:9-17, which is a rather glorious passage, on pages 154, 155 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.

Joel 2:30, which we'll discuss further below, is another important reference in that it deals with the warfare of the great tribulation. This verse is doubly significant in that it mentions "columns of smoke." This smoke (and the dust) generated during the warfare of the great tribulation will undoubtedly cause the darkening of the sun and moon pictured in Matt. 24:29. It's significant that Rev. 9:17, 18 mention smoke too. (As mentioned above, Rev. 9:13-21 are an important cross-reference for the warfare of the great tribulation.) It's significant that Joel 2:30, 31 specifically mention the darkening of the sun and moon, and that they show that this darkening will take place (just) before the day of the Lord begins.] **(22) And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.** [The "elect" are God's people, the Christians, but the elect here undoubtedly include those who will eventually become Christians (after the rapture), including the remnant of the nation Israel. Because of the intensity of the warfare of the great tribulation (Revelation 9:15, 18 show that a third of mankind will be killed, which is overwhelming, even if this third probably deals with a third of a population substantially less than the total population of the earth), there wouldn't be any people left alive on the earth if these days weren't cut short in God's end-time plans.] **(23) Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. (24) For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (25) Behold, I have told you in advance. (26) If therefore they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go forth, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. (27) For just as the lightning comes from the east [cf. Ezek. 43:2], and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.** [There's no basis for confusion whatsoever because these verses, along with 24:29-31, make it very clear that Christ's coming will be in the clouds with great glory, not in any other way, no matter what some false Christs or false prophets may say, or do. Above, under 24:9-13, I

mentioned that the supreme example of a false Christ (assuming Antichrist fits this role; and it's clear that he does in at least some ways, including his coming back from the dead), of a false prophet (the false prophet of Rev. 13:11-18; 19:20), and of false signs and wonders will take place during the second half of Daniel's 70th week; however, it's also clear that there are false Christs and false prophets in the days before the rapture too. Some are here now.] **(28) Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.** [It seems that Luke 17:37, in context with 17:22-36, helps us understand these words. In Luke 17:22-36 Jesus speaks of His end-time return; there's quite a bit of emphasis in these verses on the fact that one major purpose for His coming will be the pouring out intense judgment on the world, on those unbelieving, unrepentant, and unprepared for His coming. In response to what Jesus said, His disciples asked in Luke 17:37, "Where Lord?" And He answered, "Where the body is, there also will the vultures be gathered." The "corpse/body" apparently represents that unrepentant part of mankind totally given over to spiritual death (and sin and Satan), ripe for judgment. The "vultures" apparently represent God's agents of judgment. (Cf., e.g., Matt. 13:40-42.) Where will judgment fall? Everywhere it is appropriate, worldwide. This fits the picture of Matt. 24:26, 27, and 30 that His coming in judgment (and to save) will be a worldwide event, not limited to any one place. (It's clear though that He will end up on the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem [cf. Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:9-12].) Matthew 24:30 mentions, "then all the tribes of the earth [worldwide] will mourn" [cf. Rev. 1:7]; they will mourn because judgment day has come.] **(29) But immediately after the tribulation of those days** [This refers back to the days of the short great tribulation of Matt. 24:21, 22. The warfare of the great tribulation will have ended. Mark 13:24 has, "But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED...."] **THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT** [As I mentioned, it's significant that the smoke and dust generated during the warfare of the short great tribulation will undoubtedly block out (most of) the light coming from the sun and moon. (Revelation 9:2 confirms that it's Biblical to speak of the sun being darkened by smoke.) I also mentioned that Joel 2:30, 31 are a very important cross-reference. Joel 2:30b refers to the warfare of the great tribulation, and even mentions "columns of smoke." (Smoke is also mentioned in Rev. 9:17, 18, verses that also speak of the warfare of the great tribulation.) Then Joel 2:31 says, "The sun will be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes." I believe Joel 2:31 speaks of the same darkening of the sun and moon as Matt. 24:29. What little light from the moon that is visible on the earth will apparently have an ominous red coloration, like blood. (On the moon becoming like blood, cf. Rev. 6:12, which is discussed next.) Note that Joel 2:31 shows that the darkening of the sun and moon serve as a sign of the coming of the Lord to judge the earth. For further discussion on Joel 2:30, 31, see pages 151-153 and 156-158 (Joel 2:30-3:2 are discussed on pages 156-158) of *Mid-Week Rapture*.

Another very important cross-reference for this same darkening of the sun and moon is Rev. 6:12, with 6:12-17. Revelation 6:12 says, "...the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood." And the following verses show that these things will happen in conjunction with the coming of the day of judgment. (On Rev. 6:12-17, see pages 23, 24, 153, and 301-303 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.) Quite a few other verses include darkness in conjunction with the day of the Lord (cf., e.g., Isa. 13:6-16; Joel 2:10, 11; 3:12-17; Amos 5:18-20; 8:7-10; Zeph. 1:14-18; and Acts 2:19, 20, which quote Joel 2:30, 31.), **AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the**

heavens will be shaken [Revelation 6:12-17, just discussed, are relevant here too. Revelation 6:13 says, “and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.” (On Rev. 6:13, see pages 23, 302 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.) Falling stars (e.g., showers of meteors) will probably be visible, but the most important reality spoken of here is the casting down to the earth of Satan and his angels (from their privileged position in heavenly places [cf., e.g., Eph. 6:12]) at that time, right in the middle of Daniel’s 70th week, at the time Christ returns and judgment day begins. I consider Rev. 12:4, 7-10 to be the most important cross-reference for the falling of the stars/angels. (On these verses, see pages 15 [number 10]; 313, 314 [on Rev. 12:4]; and 317-319 [on Rev. 12:7-9] of *Mid-Week Rapture*.) Also see Isa. 13:13 with 13:6-13; 24:21; 34:4 with 34:1-17; Hag. 2:6, 21; and Heb. 12:26-29.], **(30) and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky** [On “the sign [of Christ’s coming],” see under Matt. 24:3 (the second paragraph). The great glory of His appearing will apparently be all the more spectacular in contrast with the existing darkness.], **and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn** [They will mourn because judgment day has come. Cf. Rev. 1:7; 6:15-17; Matt. 16:27; and 2 Thess. 1:6-9. All is not negative, however, for those left on earth after the rapture (as you would assume from verses like Matt. 24:37-41). As discussed under Matt. 24:9-14, many will be converted to Christ after the rapture and become part of God’s true Israel; and, beyond that, it seems that God will leave a multitude to enter the millennial kingdom (undoubtedly a billion people, or more) that are not part of (and never will be part of) true Israel, called “the nations” in Rev. 20:3. (They can be called the remnant of the nations.) Although there will be some rebelling on the part of some of these people from the nations, or at least on the part, of some of their offspring (especially see Rev. 20:7-10; cf. Isa. 65:20; Zech. 14:16-19), many of these people will end up in God’s eternal kingdom. (For more on the salvation of the remnant of the nations, see on Dan. 7:12 [pages 74, 75 of *Mid-Week Rapture*]; on Dan. 7:26, 27 [page 861; on Zech. 9:10 [page 196]; on Zech. 14:16-21 [pages 233-236]; on Rev. 13:7b, 8 [pages 332-334]; on Rev. 15:4 [pages 244-246]; and see Note 3 [especially the last paragraph] on pages 338-341. We’ll discuss the nations under Matt. 25:31-46; Revelation chapters 20-22; and in the Appendix of this paper.)], **and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory** [For a start, see number 12 on page 16 of *Mid-Week Rapture*. These words derive from Dan. 7:13, 14, which are discussed in some detail on pages 75-83 of *Mid-Week Rapture*. The adjective “great” could be taken with both “power” and “glory.” Note Mark 13:26: “And then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory.” Some other verses that speak of Christ’s coming with (great) power are Psalm 110:3; Luke 21:27; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:43; Phil. 3:20, 21; 2 Thess. 1:9 (here Paul mentions “the glory of His power”); 2 Pet. 1:16; Rev. 11:17; and 12:10. Some other verses that speak of His coming with (great) glory are Matt. 16:27; 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 21:27; and 2 Thess. 1:9.] **(31) And He will send forth His angels** [Some other verses that speak of Christ coming with the angels are Matt. 13:30, 39, 41, 49; 16:27; 25:31; Mark 8:38; 13:27; Luke 9:26; 1 Thess. 4:16 (This verse just mentions “the voice of the archangel”; cf. Jude 1:9; Rev. 12:7); 2 Thess. 1:7; Jude 1:14 (see the NIV); and Rev. 12:7.] **with A GREAT TRUMPET AND THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.** [The first order of business for Christ, after He has returned and cast down the devil and his angels, will be the gathering to Himself in the sky (the rapture) those who have been waiting for, and loving, His appearing (cf., e.g., 1 Thess. 1:9, 10; 2

Tim. 4:8). This is the same trumpet we see in 1 Cor. 15:52 (which speaks of the resurrection of the elect at the sounding of the last trumpet); in 1 Thess. 4:16, 17 (which speaks of the resurrection and rapture of the elect at the sounding of the trumpet of God); and in Rev. 11:15 (which speaks of God/Christ beginning to reign [the reign includes the salvation of His elect and the judgment of His enemies] at the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet of the book of Revelation). See numbers 11-15 on pages 15-17 of *Mid-Week Rapture*. For a discussion on this resurrection (including the question regarding who will be resurrected at this time), see under Dan. 12:2 on pages 159-161 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.

Second Thess. 2:1 is an important cross-reference: “Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him.” The noun (*episunagoge*) translated “gathering together,” which is only used twice in the New Testament, was derived from the verb used in Matt. 24:31 (*episunago*), which is translated “they will gather together.” The noun (*parousia*) translated “coming” in 2 Thess. 2:1 is also used in Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, and 39 (and in quite a few other verses of the New Testament). Second Thess. 2:1-12 are discussed in the last chapter of *Mid-Week Rapture*. The last words of 24:31, “from the four winds [which is like saying “from the north, south, east, and west”], from one end of the sky to the other [that is, from every place on the earth under the sky]” mean worldwide. See Mark 13:27.

Gathering the end-time elect remnant of Israel. In most of the verses that speak of the end-time gathering (saving) of Israel, the remnant of the nation Israel are spoken of, but it seems clear that many Gentiles will also be converted to Christ after the rapture and become part of God’s true Israel, even as we Gentiles who become Christians in the days before the rapture are grafted into God’s true Israel. (See under “Further discussion to help show that the Christian church is part of God’s true Israel and part of the seed [offspring] of God’s true Israel” on pages 315, 316 of *Mid-Week Rapture*, and see under Rev. 12:17b on pages 323, 324.)

I assume the great trumpet of Isa. 27:12, 13 is also in view here in Matt. 24:31: God will begin to gather (save) the end-time elect remnant of the nation Israel on the earth at the time of Christ’s mid-week return. See number 14 on page 17 of *Mid-Week Rapture*; see on Mic. 5:3-6 (pages 251-254); on Zech. 9:11-10:12 [The trumpet of Zech. 9:14 probably refers to this same mid-week trumpet pictured in Matt. 24:31] (pages 196-202); on Zech. 12:1-14:5 (pages 221-231); on Rev. 11:13 (pages 288, 289); on Rev. 11:19 (page 304); on Rev. 12:6 (page 317); and on Rev. 12:12-17 (pages 321-324). The discussion of Rev. 7:1-8 (pages 176-179) is also quite relevant, and many other verses also deal with the end-time salvation and gathering of the end-time remnant of Israel, including Deut. 30:1-10, espec. verse 4; Isa. 11:11-16; Jer. 23:1-8; 30:1-11, 18-22; 31:1-40; 32:36-44; 33:1-26; Ezek. 20:33-44; 34:1-31; 36:1-38; 37:1-28; Hos. 2:14-23; Joel 2:32-3:21 (Joel 2:32-3:2 are discussed on pages 156-158 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.); Mic. 2:12, 13; 7:14-20; and Rom. 9:27-29; 11:25-32.

Christ will also ultimately gather the nations into God’s eternal kingdom, as discussed briefly under the mourning of Matt. 24:30 (cf., e.g., Rev. 21:1-22:3). They are part of God’s elect; as Rev. 21:27 shows, their names are in the Lamb’s book of life (they are saved through His atoning death).] **(32) Now learn the parable from the fig tree** [Luke 21:29 has, “Behold the fig tree and all the trees”; this reading in Luke helps confirm that the fig tree doesn’t represent Israel here in Matt. 24:32.]: **when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; (33) even so**

you too, when you see all these things [Quite a few events/signs are mentioned in the preceding verses. Mark 13:29 and Luke 21:31 don't have the word "all" with "these things." Once we see a definite sign like the abomination of desolation (confirmed by other things like the ministry of the two prophets and the sounding of the first five trumpets), we will know that Christ's coming is very near.], **recognize that He** [speaking of Christ, at His mid-week return] **is near, right at the door.** [As the margin of the NASB points out, we could translate "it" instead of "He." If so, "it" would refer to the coming kingdom. Cf. Luke 21:31.] **(34) Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (35) Heaven and earth will pass away** [Cf., e.g., Isa. 51:6; 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; and Rev. 20:11; 21:1.], **but My words shall not pass away.** [Those who heard the words of Matt. 24:34 in the years between AD 30 and 70, or so, undoubtedly assumed that they applied to their generation (cf. Matt. 23:36), and that their generation would live to see the return of Christ. However, it didn't take long after the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (in AD 70) to discern that the end hadn't come. (There was no Antichrist, abomination of desolation followed by the short great tribulation, the darkened sun and moon, and the coming of Christ in glory, etc., as required by these words of Christ in the Olivet discourse, and the prophecies of Daniel and others.) From our perspective, these words of Matt. 24:34 apparently mean that the generation that begins to see the definite end-time signs will see the return, of Christ.] **(36) But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.** [Cf. Acts 1:6, 7. The dominant idea here is, since no one but the Father knows the time of Christ's return, it's of critical importance for each Christian of each generation to get ready, and to stay ready, for His return. (See Matt. 24:42 with 24:43-51; and 25:13 with 25:1-30.) The truth emphasized here must be held in tension with, and be used to balance out, the teaching of Matt. 24:9-35 that there will be events/signs signaling the nearness of Christ's coming (see 24:32-34). Signs, or no signs, it's mandatory for all Christians to always be faithful and ready for His coming. We certainly cannot wait for end-time signs to get ready for the return of Christ. From our perspective, we can see that many generations of Christians have lived out their lives, and died, before the end-time signs appeared. What if they had waited to see definite end-time signs before they got serious with God to get ready for Christ's coming? We don't know for sure when we're going to die—we can't afford to put off getting ready for Christ's return. Also, to the extent Christians aren't walking close to God, the more they can be deceived and fail to properly respond even when the signs do appear. Furthermore, as we'll discuss in the paragraph after next, if a Christian is willfully living in sin, they may well find Christ coming for them in judgment, like a thief in the night, before the time of His mid-week return.]

It seems clear that at the time of the Olivet discourse Christ didn't know the time of His return. He clearly had some limitations after His great. condescension (in the will of God the Father) to become a man (cf., e.g., Phil. 2:6-8; Luke 2:52; Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:15; and 5:8), though He didn't become just a man—He became the God-man; He didn't cease being deity, God the Son. It seems that even after His resurrection, Jesus didn't immediately know all of the details regarding the end of the age (cf. Rev. 1:1). He didn't tell us here in Matt. 24:36 (or in Acts 1:6, 7) that Christians will continue in ignorance regarding the time of His coming until the end—we won't. It seems that we are being given more light all the time; being given the book of Revelation (some sixty-five years after the Olivet discourse was given, and some twenty-five to forty years after the Gospel

of Matthew was written, assuming that Matthew was written in the late fifties, or in the sixties) was quite significant, and it seems God is giving us more understanding of the book of Revelation (and of other prophetic passages) in these last days.

Once we see the abomination of desolation, we should know the time of His coming, at least within a few days. I don't believe there's much difference between knowing the exact date of Christ's return and knowing the date within a few days. I don't believe it would be detrimental for Christians truly living for God in the last few years before Christ returns to know the exact date of His coming. (I'm not saying that we necessarily will know the exact date, even after the abomination of desolation is manifested. Sometimes the Bible uses round [approximate] numbers. See the "Discussion on the Time of the Death of the Two Prophets and the Time of Their Resurrection and Rapture" on pages 287, 288 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.) Such Christians wouldn't abuse this information as an opportunity to live in sin for a while, before repenting and getting ready for the day of Christ's return. Surely no true Christian could be that sinfully stupid. A dominant message that permeates Matt. 24:42-51 (which we'll discuss below) is that if any Christian of any generation starts thinking that he has enough time to go off into sin for a while since Christ isn't coming right away, he is making a big mistake. Such a Christian may find Christ coming for him in judgment as a thief in the night.. See 1 Thess. 5:2. It's important to note that the apostle Paul doesn't say in this verse that Christ is coming like a thief in the night for those ready for His coming (as many wrongly teach); see 1 Thess. 5:3, 4. Christ couldn't come as a thief in the night for those watching for His coming, which includes being faithful to Him and living in His truth (by His grace), nor would He have any reason to come against them in judgment, like a thief in the night. Also see Rev. 3:3; 16:15; and Matt. 24:43, 44, 48-51.

I believe it's important to see that the exhortations and warnings of Matt. 24:36-25:30 are especially needed by, and aimed at, those who live in the days before the definite end-time signs appear. For further discussion on Matt. 24:32-36, see under "Will We Know the Date of His Return" on pages 49-52 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.)] **(37) For [The KJV and NKJV have "But," based on a different reading (de) in the Greek. This same Greek word (de) is often translated "and," or, "now," and it is often left untranslated. I prefer the translation "and," "now," or just leaving this word untranslated, as does the NIV, "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."]** **the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. (38) For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, (39) and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.** [The judgment of the flood of Noah's day prefigures the flood of judgment that will flow when Christ returns to judge the earth. There's nothing wrong with eating and drinking, or marrying and giving in marriage, but the problem is that multitudes will keep on doing such things until Christ returns, all the while being indifferent, or even antagonistic, to their need to repent and to submit to Christ in humble, obedient, faith and get ready for the day of judgment. It's important to observe that these words don't apply to all men, just those not fully living for Christ as we approach the day of judgment. Noah and his family were ready for the judgment of the flood, and they entered the ark at the appropriate time, even as those ready for the return of Christ will be taken in the rapture when He returns. Noah and his family didn't know exactly when the flood was coming, but they undoubtedly knew that the ark must be finished before the flood came, and they certainly weren't surprised when the flood did come. Eventually Noah even knew (by revelation

from God) when it was time to enter the ark, and that the rain would begin in seven days—that’s rather specific and accurate, isn’t it? (See Gen. 7:1-5.) In like manner, all Christians can, and should, and must, be fully prepared for Christ’s return—those who are prepared, and waiting, and watching, certainly won’t be surprised by the time of His coming.] **(40) Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. (41) Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left.** [The ones taken will be taken in the rapture, like Noah and his family were taken in the ark, thereby escaping the flood of judgment that will fall on the earth; the ones left will face the judgment of God. The Greek verb translated “will be taken” in verses 40, 41 is *paralambano*, the same verb used in John 14:3: “And if go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am you may be also.” A different Greek verb (*airo*) is used in Matt. 24:39 of being taken away in judgment: “and took them all away.”] **(42) Therefore** [This word refers back to Matt. 24:36-41.] **be on the alert** [This Greek verb can be translated other ways: The NIV has, “Therefore keep watch”; and the KJV and NKJV have, “Watch therefore”; the Greek verb includes the idea of keeping awake; we must continually be awake (alert, watchful) in a spiritual sense, never asleep (cf., e.g., 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 3:2, 3; 16:15). I’ll quote part of what J. A. Bengel said on this verse (*New Testament Word Studies*, Vol. 1 [Kregel Publications, 1971]; originally written in Latin in 1742): “Watch, Greek *Gregoreite*, Latin *Vigilate*; – This was the reason, no doubt, that the name *Gregory* and *Vigilantius* were so common in the ancient Church.”], **for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.** [Mark 13:33 has, “Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the *appointed* (this word is in italics in the NASB) time is.” As mentioned above, the dominant thought here is that since we don’t know the time of Christ’s coming, it’s mandatory for each Christian of each generation to always be alert and ready for His return. Also, as mentioned above, these words are especially appropriate for those Christians living in the days *before* the definite end-time signs are manifested.] **(43) But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.** [This verse (and the following verses) illustrates the need for all Christians to always be awake/alert/watching/ready/prepared, then the thief won’t be able to steal from those in the house. Since we don’t know when the thief is coming, we must always be ready/prepared; since we don’t know when the Lord will return, we must always be ready/prepared for His return.] **(44) For this reason** [since we don’t know the time of His coming] **you be ready** [at all times] **too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.** [(Cf. Luke 12:40.) In the first place, it should be noted that there never will be an hour when we do not think the Lord is coming for those who heed Jesus’ admonition contained in Matt. 24:36-51. Since He has commanded us to always be ready for His return, not knowing the time of His return, we’ll never think of an hour/time that we don’t think He’s coming. The idea here – as Matt. 24:48-51 confirm – is of a Christian thinking he has time to live in sin for a while and then repent before Christ returns. Such thinking is always faulty, and very dangerous. Even if Christ doesn’t return in glory (which could happen while that “Christian” is asleep in sin and totally unprepared for His return), He may well come in judgment against that Christian in judgment (as we discussed under Matt. 24:36), or that Christian may just die in sin before the Lord returns. As I mentioned in *Mid-Week Rapture*, I believe there’s a better way to translate the Greek here: “for the hour that you do not think He comes, the Son of Man comes.” And again, the point is that

there must never be such an hour/time when we're confident we have time to live in sin (not living in the center of His will) before repenting to get ready for His coming.] **(45) Who then is the faithful and sensible slave** [The KJV, NKJV, and the NIV have "servant."] **whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? (46) Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.** [In other words, that Christian (in this case a leader in the Body of Christ) stays faithful to his Master to the end.] **(47) Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.** [Cf., e.g., Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17, 19.] **(48) But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time** [In other words, this is an hour/time that he doesn't think that his master will return, and that he has some time for some "fun" with good old sin before getting ready for his master's return.], **(49) and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; (50) the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know** [As I mentioned, the point is that there must never be such an hour/time for a Christian, and there never will be such a time for those who remain faithful to the Master and His instructions.], **(51) and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites** [which he certainly proved himself to be; Luke 12:46 speaks of assigning him a place with the unbelievers]; **weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth** [It doesn't really make much difference whether the Lord Jesus comes after this slave/servant in judgment at the end of this age, or at an earlier time, or whether the slave/Christian just dies in sin—the end result will be the same. It seems that this slave truly was a Christian at the beginning (he represented a Christian in this parable); he was even put in a position of substantial leadership over the other slaves (Christians); this fact makes his sin all the more serious. See Luke 12:35-48. Matt. 24:42-51 are discussed on pages 43-45 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.]

MATTHEW CHAPTER 25

This Paper Deals Extensively with the Topic of God's Ultimate Salvation Plans for the Nations.

The parable of the ten virgins in Matt. 25:1-13 and the parable of the talents in 25:14-30 both continue with the theme of Matt. 24:36-51 that each Christian of each generation must become faithful, and stay faithful, to Christ until He returns (or until death), always being ready for His return (including being ready for a lengthy delay in His return). Matthew 25:1-13 continue with the thought of 24:36-51, that one reason we always need to be ready is that we don't know the time of His return (see 25:13). The parable of the ten virgins (the virgins represent Christians) shows that the prudent/wise virgins, who are ready for Christ's return when He comes, will be rewarded with entrance to God's eternal kingdom; those not ready will be excluded from the kingdom. (In one sense God's eternal kingdom doesn't begin until after the millennial kingdom; in another sense, it's clear that believers enter the glory of eternal life at the time Christ returns. Matthew chapter 25, including 25:31-46, deals with entrance into, or exclusion from, God's eternal kingdom, not just the millennial kingdom [cf. Matt. 25:41, 46].)

The parable of the talents covers much of the same ground as the parable of the ten virgins, using a different picture, but emphasizing the same basic truth that each Christian must be faithful to Christ until He returns, or until death. Those who are found faithful will be rewarded; they will be rewarded, not only with entrance into God's eternal kingdom, but also with the privilege of exercising authority in that kingdom. And, again, those not found faithful are denied entrance into the kingdom. Both of these parables deal with the end-of-the-age judgment of all Christians (the faithful and the unfaithful).

After dealing with the judgment of Christians in Matt. 24:45-51; 25:1-30, the Lord Jesus turns to the judgment of the nations in Matt. 25:31-46. The nations represent the rest of mankind, all those who aren't Christians (those who aren't part of God's true Israel). The somewhat surprising thing is that these verses seem to teach (I can't be dogmatic regarding this interpretation) that many of these people will be found to be among the elect of God (their names will be found in the Lamb's book of life). As I understand it, however, those from the nations that gain access into God's eternal kingdom through the Lamb of God (cf. Rev. 21:27) will forever be distinguished from God's true Israel (which includes all believers from the Old Testament days and all true Christians [new-covenant believers]). For one thing, true Israel will forever reign with the Lord Jesus Christ (and God the Father and the Holy Spirit); the nations won't reign. We discussed the salvation of the nations somewhat under Matt. 24:30, 31, and we'll discuss it at length as we continue. (These people who are elect of the nations, assuming that there are such people, would not be people that God had dealt with about the gospel who rejected it; they would be people that had not been solidly confronted with the gospel.)

Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins [The virgins represent Christians (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2, 3), born-again Christians; all of them had some oil; their lamps had all been burning (Matt. 25:8). However, as we'll see, some of them don't make faithfulness to God top priority, and when Christ returns, they aren't ready for His coming. The primary message of the parable is that each Christian must make their salvation top

priority; they will, thereby, make sure they are always faithful and ready for Christ's return, or for the time of their death, whichever comes first. By speaking of ten virgins (ten, by the way, can symbolize completeness, the complete number), instead of the bride of Christ, Christ was able to include both prudent/wise and foolish virgins.], **who took their lamps** [Their lamps represent their lives; their lives must be full of light through submission to God and His Word and through maintaining a walk in the grace of God and in the Holy Spirit, the One who enables Christians to walk in the light (which includes truth, righteousness, and holiness).], **and went out to meet the bridegroom.** [The bridegroom represents the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 9:15; John 3:29). In a very real sense, each Christian of each generation is on a pilgrimage to meet Christ, either at death, or at the time of His return. (I remind the reader that in the early days of the Christian church, Christians were thinking that Christ was probably coming soon. It seems that God wanted them [and the Christians of subsequent generations] to think that way. At least it is very clear that He requires each Christian of each generation to always be ready for Christ's coming.)] **(2) And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent [wise].** [The KJV, NKJV, and NIV have "wise" instead of "prudent" here, and in 25:4, 8, and 9. The Greek adjective translated prudent here is also used in Matt. 24:45, translated "sensible" by the NASB, and "wise" by the KJV, NKJV, and NIV. I prefer "wise" in all five verses.] **(3) For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them** [As I mentioned, they had some oil in their lamps (25:8), but they didn't make adequate provision for the future by making God and the things of God top priority, things like learning God's Word and being doers of the Word, and like learning to walk in/by/after the Holy Spirit in humility, righteousness, and holiness. (Oil apparently symbolizes the grace/Spirit of God here. We walk in the grace/Spirit of God by faith.) They didn't do all that was required of them to be faithful to their master, who demands His disciples always be faithful and ready for His return, no matter when He comes. Cf. Luke 12:35-40.], **(4) but the prudent [wise]** [This prudence/wisdom isn't a matter of having a high IQ; it's a matter of submission to God and His Word in humble faith, making Him top priority. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.] **took oil in flasks along with their lamps.** [The prudent/wise took God's Word seriously (including the need to understand it) and made it a top priority item to do what they must do today so they could always be faithful and ready for tomorrow, including being prepared for a delay in Christ's coming, even a lengthy delay (even a two-thousand year delay). Delay, or no delay, signs, or no signs, we have been commanded, and enabled, to always be ready for His return. It's not enough to have a good beginning, we must appropriate God's sufficient grace (through a humble, obedient faith) so we can have a good ending. That's what the wise virgins do.] **(5) Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep.** [On a delay in His coming, cf., e.g., Matt. 24:48 (The Greek verb [actually it's a participle] translated "while [the bridegroom] was delaying" here was also used in Matt. 24:48, "is not coming for a long time"); and Luke 19:11-27, especially verse 11.

In the viewpoint of this parable, there's apparently nothing wrong with sleeping (physically); the wise virgins were sleeping too; but it's mandatory that we don't ever sleep spiritually (cf., e.g., Matt. 24:42-44 [see under these verses]; 1 Thess. 5:4-8. It's clear that we must be prepared for a delay in Christ's coming; we must always be ready for His coming, no matter when He comes.] **(6) But at midnight there was a shout, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."** **(7) Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps.** [Trimming the lamps means putting them in order, including trimming the

wicks and adding oil.] **(8) And the foolish said to the prudent [wise], “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.”** [It’s clear that their lamps had been burning. As I mentioned, this seems to clearly indicate that they had become born-again Christians—they had, at least to some extent, a good beginning.] **(9) But the prudent [wise] answered, saying, “No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.”** [There’s no idea here of the prudent/wise being stingy, selfish, or unloving. There are some things that one person can’t do for another; we are all responsible before God to be prepared for the return of Christ. This parable makes it quite clear that we can’t just wait until the last minute to try to get ready—we must get ready, and stay ready. Anything less is very dangerous, and we have been forewarned.] **(10) And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready** [Again, we must always be ready.] **went in with him to the wedding feast** [This is comparable to being taken in the rapture/to entering God’s eternal kingdom. On the “wedding feast,” cf. Matt. 22:1-14; Rev. 19:7-9.]; **and the door was shut. (11) And later the other virgins also came, saying, “Lord, lord, open up for us.”** [Compare Matt. 7:21-27 (Note that Matt. 7:24-27 use the word *wise* for those who act upon the words of Jesus and the word *foolish* for those who don’t.); Luke 6:46-49; and 13:22-30.] **(12) But He answered and said, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you.”** [These are words that no Christian ever wants to hear; we must be ready for Christ’s return. Matt. 7:23 has, “Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ ” (Matthew 7:23 seems to be somewhat different than 25:12 in that it carries the idea that those “Christians” never were known by Christ. Does Christ teach here in 25:1-13 that it’s totally impossible for any of the foolish who miss the rapture to repent, get ready, and eventually make it into God’s eternal kingdom? If all we had was this parable, we would have to answer *yes* to this question, and I don’t want to minimize the seriousness of not being ready for Christ’s coming when He comes; however, I wouldn’t want to say that it’s totally impossible that such a Christian could become faithful to Christ and live for Him throughout the very difficult days of the second half of Daniel’s 70th week and eventually enter God’s eternal kingdom. (As discussed under Matthew chapter 24, we only learn details like the fact that many people will be saved after the rapture through subsequent revelation, especially through the book of Revelation.) Anyway, no Christian has any business ever being unready for Christ’s return; it’s an extremely dangerous place to be.) **(13) Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.** [Compare Matt. 24:36-46, especially 24:42; see under that verse. The same Greek verb (*gregoreo*) is used in Matt. 24:42 and 25:13.] **(14) For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves** [The KJV, NKJV, and NIV translate “servants.”], **and entrusted his possessions to them.** [(Cf. Matt. 24:45-51; Luke 19:11-27.) The master represents the Lord Jesus Christ; He was leaving to go back to heaven, after His death and resurrection. His slaves/servants represent Christians; they must be faithful to Him in His absence; they must be faithful to all that He requires of them until He returns (which proves to be “after a long time” [25:19]). Christians that are always faithful are always ready for Christ’s return, no matter when He returns. When He returns there will be a day of reckoning for all Christians (based on what they have, or have not done, which demonstrates what was in their hearts—those walking in faith will have righteous lives by the grace of God in Christ).] **(15) And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.** [It’s difficult to assign a monetary value to the talent that Jesus spoke of

here (the estimates cover a wide range), but it was a substantial amount of money, at least the equivalent of several thousand U.S. dollars. In this parable faithfulness is measured in terms of being faithful to use the master's money in a way that will benefit the master, accomplishing His will and purposes. All had the "ability" to be faithful to the master (according to the master's evaluation); for one thing, His grace is sufficient; He gives us the grace to be, and to do, all that He requires of us; He gives us the grace to be faithful to Him in every way. (We appropriate, and walk, in God's sufficient grace by faith, in accordance with His Word.)

It's true, of course, that we Christians are required to be faithful with (to rightly use) the money that comes to us, but that's only a small part of our responsibility to be faithful to our master—we must be faithful in every area of our lives. Leon Morris (*Gospel According to Matthew* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1992]) points out, "From this parable we have derived the use of 'talent' to indicate abilities of various kinds, but we should be clear that the word had no such associations for Jesus and his hearers. It was simply a unit of weight." **(16) Immediately** [This word helps demonstrate that this slave/servant with the five talents (and the slave/servant with the two talents, who functioned "in the same manner" [25:17] as this slave/servant with the five talents) made faithfulness to his master top priority, as is required of slaves/servants. Christians are slaves/servants of God, as many verses of the New Testament show (and they are sons, etc.), but this slavery/servanthood brings the only true freedom.] **the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. (17) In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. (18) But he who received the one talent went away and dug in the ground, and hid his master's money.** [As we'll see, this behavior manifested total unfaithfulness, and there was no legitimate excuse for it.] **(19) Now after a long time the master of those slaves [servants] came and settled accounts with them. (20) And the one who had received the five talents came and brought five more talents, saying, "Master, you entrusted five talents to me; see, I have gained five more talents." (21) His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave [servant]; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master."** [Hearing words like these from the Lord Jesus at the end is all that really matters; we must live our lives in the light of the day of reckoning. To "enter into the joy of [our] master" is to enter the joy/rejoicing of God's eternal kingdom, the joy that comes with experiencing the fullness of eternal life and reigning with the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. Christians can, of course, have substantial joy during this present age (cf., e.g., Luke 10:17; John 15:11; Rom. 14:17; and Gal. 5:22), but I'm quite sure the joy of the next age will be very much greater. Note that Matt. 25:21, 23 speak of the future state of joy for those who are faithful and ready for Christ's return. A primary cause for rejoicing now (during this present age) is the anticipation of the eternal state of glory waiting for us. (Cf., e.g., Matt. 5:12; Luke 10:20; Rom. 12:12; 1 Pet. 1:6, 8; and 4:13. The Greek noun [*chara*] translated joy was derived from the verb [*chairō*] translated rejoice.)

I assume this is "the joy of our master" in that this joy/this state of joy comes from Him. (Everything good comes from Him.) As I mentioned, part of the reward for faithfulness in this parable is being given authority in God's eternal kingdom. All those who make it to heaven as part of God's true Israel will reign. (See under "thrones were set up" of Dan. 7:9, including the section titled "A More Detailed Look at Those Who Will Reign with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Time They Will Begin to Reign" on

pages 72, 73 of *Mid-Week Rapture*; also see Rev. 22:5.) Apparently, however, some will have greater authority than others (not that one is better than the other); see Matt. 24:45-47; see under Dan. 12:3 on pages 161, 162 of *Mid-Week Rapture*; and see under 1 Cor. 15:41 in this paper.] **(22) The one also who had received the two talents came up and said, “Master, you entrusted to me two talents; see, I have gained two more talents.”** **(23) His master said to him, “Well done, good and faithful slave [servant]; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”** [This slave/servant, like the first one, was faithful to his master; he did all that was required of him. Will this slave have less authority than the first one in God’s eternal kingdom? It could be, but I don’t believe we have enough information to answer this question with any assurance; however, we can be fully confident that God does/will do all things well, and there won’t be any complaints. (There had better not be any complaints, or any superiority complexes, or inferiority complexes, etc.)] **(24) And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, “Master [He called him master (this same Greek word is normally translated Lord), but he didn’t serve him/Him as master/Lord. Cf., e.g., Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 6:46], I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed.** [Many understand the Greek verb translated scattered here to refer to winnowing, where the chaff (not seed) is scattered. The word for seed is in italics in the NASB.

Sin (including doubt and rebellion) starts with a wrong view of God, a view derived from the lies of the devil. This started for man in the Garden of Eden with Satan attacking the truthfulness and character of God—and Eve listened to him; and, at least to some extent, she agreed with him. We can always find something to complain about, if we allow ourselves to. Even in the Garden you could find something to complain about, something that could be looked at in a [faulty/sinful] way that seemed to demonstrate that God must have done/be doing something wrong. (Who is God to make Adam work in the Garden? Why doesn’t He work in the Garden Himself? Why did He give Adam more responsibility than he could handle? Why such a wife? Why did God permit the serpent to come? Why did He create the serpent to begin with? Why did He let Satan rebel? Why didn’t He just destroy Satan after He rebelled? Why did God allow free will? Didn’t He know what would happen? If He didn’t know, why not? If He did know, then He must be responsible for our sin! This must be His fault! Why did He put that tree, with its deadly fruit, in the Garden? This must be man abuse! What a sad place to be, only one really good thing in the Garden and man can’t have it!) We must be very careful who, and what, we listen to. And we must be very careful we don’t leave any room for thoughts against God, thoughts of rebellion, to take root in our hearts. By the way, we’re the ones on trial, not God.

The attitude of the slave/servant in this parable regarding his master apparently carries the idea that there’s something wrong with the master gaining benefit from work he didn’t personally do, as if such work necessarily means the exploitation of others. He didn’t respect the master; he didn’t love the master; and we can undoubtedly say he didn’t want to benefit the master; his master certainly didn’t deserve it, he thought.

A slave, a servant, a worker, a Christian can always find a way to look at things in a way that causes dissatisfaction (and the devil will give us as much help as much as we’ll take); however, in the case of man’s dealings with God, the complaints are always totally inappropriate, and sinful. A master, an owner, a boss, etc. have some rights, but they can, and sometimes do, abuse their rights; God certainly has rights over us (He is God; He is our Creator, our Savior, our Sustainer, and our Judge), but He doesn’t abuse His rights. In

most ways it would be wrong to say that God is “hard” (He is loving, generous, quick to forgive when His slaves/servants repent, etc.), but He does demand faithfulness—that’s a dominant point in this parable. And the Bible frequently speaks of His wrath.] **(25) And I was afraid** [This wasn’t a genuine, healthy, Biblical fear of God; such a fear would have led to obedience; he wasn’t afraid to be unfaithful to his master. (On the fear of the Lord, see the discussion under Phil. 2:12 on page 35 of *The Christian, the Law, and Legalism*.) The master totally rejected his excuses, and he pointed out what the real problem was in the next verse.], **and went away and hid your talent in the ground; see, you have what is yours.”** **(26) But his master answered and said to him, “You wicked, lazy slave [servant], you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no seed. (27) Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest.** [The Old Testament did not permit the Israelites to charge interest to one another (cf. Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 23:19; Psalm 15:5; and Ezek. 18:8); Deut. 23:20, however, permitted charging interest to foreigners.] **(28) Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.”** [I’m sure we would push the details of this parable too far if we were to think of more being given to the slave/servant who now has ten talents but more not being given to the faithful slave/servant who now has four talents. See the next verse.] **(29) For to everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.** [Compare Matt. 13:12; Mark 4:25; and Luke 8:18. This concept is easy to understand: The one who loves the things of God (like the balanced truth of His Word, righteousness, holiness, and the fruit and gifts of the Spirit) will rightly use them for the glory of God. Those who don’t love and appreciate what they have from God won’t use it, and eventually what little they have will be taken away. This last slave/servant had clearly demonstrated that he wasn’t going to rightly use the talent he had been given.] **(30) And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** [The “outer darkness” is only mentioned in Matthew (also Matt. 8:12; 22:13, but cf., e.g., 2 Pet. 2:4 [The NASB has, “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.” I believe the BAGD Greek Lexicon’s “[held them] captive in Tartarus” is better than the NASB’s “cast them into hell.”]; 2 Pet. 2:17; and Jude 1:13.) The words “weeping and gnashing of teeth” are also found in Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; and Luke 13:28. (As I mentioned Matt. 8:12; 22:13 also mention the “outer darkness.” Matthew 13:42, 50 combine the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” with being cast into the furnace of fire.)

Ultimately there are two possible destinies for man: To have a place in God’s eternal kingdom of life and light, or to be excluded from that kingdom. The expressions “outer darkness” and Gehennah, the lake of fire (cf. Matt. 25:41, 46; 13:42, 50; and Rev. 20:14, 15) apparently speak of the same basic reality: eternal separation from God, bearing the penalty for (unrepented of) rebellion against Him. God is a God of light, and His kingdom is a kingdom of light. (God’s light, understood in a full sense, includes truth, divine order, peace, love, righteousness, holiness, and health.) To be separated from Him and His kingdom means separation from the light, and the resultant darkness.] **(31) But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him** [This is the same coming pictured in Matt. 24:30, 31; see the discussion under those verses.], **then He will sit on His glorious throne** [the throne of His glory]. **(32) And all the nations will be gathered**

before Him [The Lord Jesus will begin to reign (the throne goes with the reigning, which includes judging) at the time of His mid-week return. (Cf., e.g., Matt. 16:27; Rev. 11:15-18; and 12:10; on this reign see number 15 on page 17 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.) It's important to see that (in the context of the Olivet discourse) Christ has already judged all Christians (the faithful and the unfaithful), as pictured in Matt. 24:45-25:30, before we come to this account of His judging the nations (the rest of mankind) in Matt. 25:31-46. The judgments of Matt. 24:45-25:30 cause a separation between the saved and the lost of Christ's disciples, even as the judgment of the nations in Matt. 25:31-46 causes a separation between the saved (the sheep) and the lost (the goats) of the nations. It's also important to see that the resurrected/transformed and glorified brothers of the Lord Jesus Christ (all the members of God's true Israel) will be with Him when He judges the nations (see, e.g., 1 Thess. 4:17); they will even be reigning with Him. Matthew 24:30, 31 confirm that the glorified saints are already with Christ: They are gathered to Him when He comes. Here in Matt. 25:32 we read of a subsequent gathering: The nations "will be gathered before Him."

A Few More Comments Regarding the Judgment of Christ's Disciples. We discussed the fact that, as it has turned out (though this point isn't spelled out in Matt. 24:45-25:30), many generations of Christians have lived and died before the Lord returns to judge His disciples. (If God had made it clear that the first Christian generation wasn't the last generation, He would have undercut the Biblical emphasis on the nearness of the end. Each generation was apparently to live in the light of the nearness of the end.) I believe we can say that the judgments of Matt. 24:45-25:30 include the judgment of the Christians of all generations who will have died before Christ returns. Those judged faithful (judged to be true Christians) will be resurrected and glorified and enter God's eternal kingdom at the time of Christ's mid-week return (along with those represented by the five wise virgins of Matt. 25:1-13). We can apparently also say that at the time of their deaths a major aspect of the judgment of faithful (true) Christians takes place, when they are taken to heaven (heaven in a preliminary sense, before the day of resurrection, glorification, and reigning; cf. 2 Cor. 5:1, 8; Phil. 1:21, 23; and 1 Thess. 4:14). The judgment of all Christians who are converted before the rapture will be completed by the time they begin to reign in the middle of Daniel's 70th week. The judgment of all the true (faithful) Christians who are converted after Christ returns will be completed before the millennial kingdom reign begins (cf. Rev. 20:4).

What About the Believers from Old Testament Days? I assume that those who are judged to be faithful (true believers) will also be resurrected and glorified at Christ's mid-week return. They are part of God's true Israel.

Some Concluding Remarks Regarding God's True Israel. When the millennial kingdom begins, all the members of God's true Israel will have been judged, resurrected/transformed, and glorified, and they will have begun to reign with the Lord Jesus Christ. It's quite possible that (in God's plans) true Israel will have become complete by the time the millennial kingdom begins, and the call to become a member of God's true Israel will no longer be extended after this time. On the resurrection/transformation of God's true Israel, see on Dan. 12:2 on pages 159-161 of *Mid-Week Rapture*. On the reign of true Israel, see "A More Detailed Look at Those Who Will Reign with the Lord Jesus

Christ and the Time They Will Begin to Reign” on pages 72, 73 of *Mid-Week Rapture*.

Christ’s End-Time Judgment of the Nations. It’s important to see that this account of Christ’s judgment of the nations (Matt. 25:31-46) is quite abbreviated and quite simplified; it provides a brief, summarizing account of the nations being judged according to their works. (Judgment according to works doesn’t deny the fact that salvation comes only through God’s grace in Christ.) This account skips the details of the judging that takes place throughout the second half of Daniel’s 70th week (including Armageddon) and the subjugation of all God’s enemies (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 15:24-26; Rev. 11:15-20:3), and it skips the millennial kingdom. It (like Matt. 24:45-25:30) skips mentioning that many generations of people from the nations are included here, and that those who have died will be resurrected before this judgment.

This account also fails to explicitly mention that there (apparently) will be a major difference between the eternal destinies of true Israel and the saved/elect of the nations in God’s eternal kingdom. For one very significant difference, true Israel will reign, the nations won’t. This difference, which is pictured in other passages (including Revelation chapters 21, 22) can be inferred from Matt. 24:45-25:30 in that it is mentioned several times that the faithful Christians (those who enter God’s eternal kingdom) are given authority to reign, but it isn’t mentioned in Matt. 25:31-46 that those saved as part of the nations will reign. For another significant difference, the members of true Israel are presented as “brothers” of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matt. 25:31-46 (see verse 40). It isn’t surprising, as discussed above, that the Olivet discourse would skip over many end-time details, and especially details that we learn about mostly from the book of Revelation (which was given some sixty-five years after the Olivet discourse). Most Biblical accounts skip details that we must learn from other passages. And that’s especially true for a passage like the one we’re studying, which has many features of a parable, and is included in a discourse following three parables.

It’s important to see that this account (Matt. 25:31-46) isn’t at all limited to a judgment of the nations to determine who will be permitted to enter the *millennial* kingdom, as some teach. The eternal destinies of those from the nations throughout this lengthy Christian age are in view here. As I mentioned, the eternal nature of this judgment is demonstrated by Matt. 25:41, 46.

We wouldn’t have to stretch this judgment scene very far to say that it could easily include the judgment of the nations that lived in Old Testament days; I assume they will be judged at this time even though they’re not specifically mentioned here. They’re not mentioned here because the focus here is on the judgment of those from the nations that have lived at the same time as, and have interacted with, Christians. If this scene were extended to include the judgment of the nations that lived in Old Testament days, it would undoubtedly emphasize their interaction with, and their treatment of, the members of God’s true Israel in Old Testament days.

Although it certainly is true that the judgment of the nations on the basis of their works involves more than whether they did, or did not, extend mercy to Christians, such works are the only ones mentioned here. (The next paragraph helps explain this mention of extending mercy to Christians.) Such works are well suited to manifest what is in the heart. Works reflect what is in the heart, and even for those from the nations (who weren’t born-again), their works flowed, at least to some extent, from a heart open to God/from faith in God (but not faith in the full sense that they would be considered believers in New

Testament days, or in the Old Testament days, at least not most of them).

This teaching by the Lord Jesus Christ is designed to strongly emphasize His love and concern for His disciples throughout His time of separation from them, a time that involves many difficulties. (In some very significant ways, He is with us throughout this present age [cf. Matt. 28:20].) This love and concern for His disciples is a dominant point in Matt. 25:31-46; it could be considered the dominant point. Keep in mind that this discourse was given by the Lord Jesus, and was written by Matthew (under God's direction) for the benefit of the Christian church. It's more important for us to know of God's love for us than for us to know His ultimate plans for the nations.

The other contender for the dominant point in this account is the information that a large number of people from the nations (the sheep) will ultimately be saved and have a place in God's eternal kingdom. The sheep are surprised by their salvation, and by the reason given for it. They undoubtedly are overwhelmed by God's saving grace. One reason this teaching is so significant is that the New Testament has so little to say on this topic. We'll discuss this salvation of the sheep as we continue.

The most important cross-reference for this judgment of the nations is the great-white-throne judgment of Rev. 20:11-15 (at the end of the millennium) with Rev. 21:1-22:3, verses that show the entrance of the saved/elect from the nations into the eternal life of God's eternal kingdom after the great-white-throne judgment. (At least that's what I see in Rev. 20:11-22:3. Many, even the majority, don't agree with this interpretation, at least not yet, but, as we'll discuss, there is a trend in the direction of seeing more hope for the salvation of some non-Christians/the nations.) It's important to see that those saved from the nations that enter God's eternal kingdom (His new earth with its New Jerusalem) will enter by the grace of God through Jesus Christ—they are part of God's elect (Rev. 21:27 shows that their names are written in the Lamb's book of life—the fact that their names have been written in the Lamb's book of life since the foundation of the world [cf. Rev. 13:8; 17:8] shows that the salvation of the elect of the nations has been part of God's plan from the beginning); however, as I have mentioned, they apparently are not, and never will be, part of God's true Israel. (I don't expect to hear one complaint from the sheep because they aren't part of true Israel.) Revelation 20:11-15 aren't discussed hardly at all in *Mid-Week Rapture*; Rev. 21:1-22:3 are discussed to some extent on pages 338-341. We'll discuss Revelation chapters 20-22 in a thorough, verse-by-verse manner after we finish Matthew chapter 25. (The discussion of those chapters is included on the internet.) The study of those chapters will help substantiate the interpretation of Matt. 25:31-46 given here.

In the Appendix of this paper, we'll consider many other passages of Scripture (beyond Rev. 20:1-22:3) that will help substantiate the interpretation given here regarding the salvation of the nations. (Part of the content of that Appendix is included on the internet.) In the Appendix we'll also discuss some of the viewpoints that have existed throughout much of the history of the Christian church regarding the possibility of salvation of people that weren't old-covenant believers in Old Testament days, or born-again Christians in New Testament days. Some of these viewpoints will help substantiate what I say here regarding the salvation of the nations. In our day there are many Christians, including many evangelicals (and the number is increasing), that believe many such persons will end up being saved by God's grace in Christ Jesus. These views deal, for the most part, with those who haven't been confronted, at least not adequately confronted, with the gospel.

Some Important Comments Regarding This Interpretation of God's Judgment of the Nations.

We have to be careful, humble, and cautious when dealing with a topic like this, making it a top priority to aim for the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches. We certainly don't need any more heresies, or new half-baked revelations, or things that cause unnecessary divisions in the Body of Christ. We must be careful who we listen to; we can't afford to accept everything we hear; we must humbly, carefully, and prayerfully check it out. I'm not an expert on the various viewpoints held by different segments of the Christian church regarding the ultimate destiny of non-Christians (the nations), but I do know that in our day some of those who promote the viewpoint that many (or, most; or, all) of them will be saved are quite unorthodox on the Christian basics. They may deny the virgin birth, the atoning death, and/or the resurrection of Jesus Christ; they may deny the existence of Satan and demons; etc. They don't have a sufficiently high view of the Bible. I'm not the judge of anyone, but I can't consider this real Christianity. I don't want to get very close to any slippery slopes; you can go down a long way. I plan to go up.

It's also true, however, that we do need to rightly divide all of God's Word; we can't avoid a Biblical truth (or passages of the Bible) just because some unorthodox Christians have spoken on that topic; we all should be open to the fact that we still have things (much) to learn, and we have errors in what we believe. I believe I have a solid Scriptural basis for the interpretation given here, but I don't claim to have all the answers. I have been teaching Matt. 25:31-46 and Rev. 20:1-22:3 the way I do in this paper for quite a few years (but with reserve and caution); however, I'm still open to further light on these verses.

What I'm sharing here regarding the salvation of the nations doesn't deal with the heart of the Christian gospel—it doesn't directly affect our salvation. The controversial points deal with God's future plans for, and judgment of, the nations. I interpret this passage as I do for one primary reason—I believe (but not dogmatically) that this is what the Bible teaches. I also believe this topic is important enough to deserve our attention, even if it's not at the heart of the Christian gospel. Furthermore, the more we draw close to the time of the rapture, the more important it becomes for us to rightly understand God's end-time prophecies, especially the book of Revelation.

As Christians we are only authorized to share one primary message with mankind everywhere: All mankind (which, according to the Bible, is in spiritual death and under sin) is called to repent and to submit to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in humble, obedient, faith in order to get ready to face God on the day of judgment (cf., e.g., Acts 17:30, 31). We certainly aren't authorized to tell the nations (non-Christians) to make sure they do a few good deeds for Christians (or do any number of good works) so they can be sure they'll go to heaven. At the same time, we aren't commanded to tell them, I don't believe, that everyone who has died the last two thousand years that wasn't a born-again Christian is necessarily destined for hell. Some questions we aren't able to fully answer, or to answer with authority; however, we can trust God, the Judge of all the earth, to do what is right (I mean really right, I mean fully right, with no mistakes of any kind). He won't make any mistakes regarding who He takes to heaven (through Jesus Christ) by His grace.

There are some apparent differences between the salvation of true Israel and the salvation of the nations; however, even with those saved from the nations, the works are an expression of what's in the heart; the works (at least to some extent) manifest something of

faith in God. The New Testament doesn't tell us much about the salvation of the nations. (We don't have a need to know much; God, the Savior and the Judge, will take care of the details. We have a need to understand, and to live in line with, the gospel.) Many Christians don't have any room for the concept of a somewhat distinct salvation for the nations (as distinct from the salvation of true Israel), and I don't believe I must be dogmatic on this point.

I admit that I like to think in terms of the population of heaven being as large as possible (at the expense of the population of hell); however, the only really important question is, What does God think?/What does the Bible teach? I also like to think that no one will miss heaven, and go to hell, over a technicality, like a failure to be confronted with the true gospel. (One factor that we must take into consideration is that sometimes substantial parts of the Christian church have been so backslidden that they would tend to frighten away prospective converts; I'm not exaggerating.) I want to think that all who miss heaven will do so because of a rebellious, unrepentant heart (that's not about to change), a heart full of rebellion against God and His ways. Such people wouldn't really want to be in heaven, not that will want the alternative.

I try to make it a top priority item to not let my desires, feelings, or the popularity of a particular teaching affect my interpretation/teaching of the Scriptures. Many evangelicals, and there are more all the time, agree that some Christians have been overly restrictive regarding who will ultimately make it to heaven, often dogmatically excluding all people that have lived the last two thousand years that didn't become born-again Christians, including those who have never heard the gospel. (See the Appendix.) I don't believe it should be a test of Christian orthodoxy to insist that only a few, a small minority of those who have lived on the earth, will make it to heaven. I don't know how many will ultimately enter heaven (I'm speaking of true Israel plus the elect of the nations), but I won't be shocked if more than half make it to heaven. I'm certainly not saying that it will turn out this way. We'll discuss the verses that speak of a "few" being saved on pages 125-127.]; **and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats** [This separating involves God's judging, and as 25:35-46 show, this judging is based on works. Judgment according to works for all mankind is a common Biblical theme (cf. Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Matt. 16:27; John 5:28, 29; Rom. 14:11, 12; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:10; 11:15; Gal. 6:7-9; Eph. 5:3-7; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12, 13; and 22:12). This doesn't mean that anyone can earn a place in heaven by their works; everyone in heaven will be there because of God's grace granted through Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God. This includes all those saved from the nations, as Rev. 21:27 shows, even as it includes all the members of God's true Israel.]; **(33) and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. (34) Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.** [Those likened to sheep are granted entrance into God's eternal kingdom. In the salvation plans of God, this kingdom has been "prepared...from the foundation of the world." (Cf., e.g., Matt. 13:35; 20:23; 1 Cor. 2:9; and Heb. 11:16.) God's plans from the foundation of the world include who His elect are, based on His foreknowledge (cf. Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:28-30; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; and 21:27). As I mentioned, Rev. 21:27 demonstrates that the names of the elect from the nations are written in the Lamb's book of life. Revelation 13:8; 17:8 demonstrate that these names have been in the book of life since the foundation of the world. (Many verses, including Rev. 13:8; 17:8, demonstrate that the names of all the members of God's true Israel are in

the Lamb's book of life.) All salvation flows from God's grace, not works that merit salvation.] **(35) For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; (36) naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me."** **(37) Then the righteous** [The adjective *righteous* is used here, as it often is, in a *relatively* righteous sense. For one thing, Christ wasn't saying that they were righteous like born-again Christians are righteous, who had received the imputed and imparted righteousness of God. There is no denial of the fact that the Bible teaches that all men (with the exception of born-again Christians) are spiritually dead and (to one degree or another) sinners. Some are relatively righteous in that they have a heart (somewhat) open to God and do some righteous things; such people are often quick to admit that they need to repent and receive forgiveness for their sins.] **will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give You drink? (38) And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? (39) And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" (40) And the King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."** [We won't begin to understand these verses until we understand who "these brothers of [Christ]" are. Many understand them to refer to the needy of mankind, worldwide. The Bible shows that we should show concern for the needy of mankind (and especially if they are, in some ways, innocent; e.g., the orphaned, widowed, enslaved, or otherwise mistreated). However, I'm confident that these aren't the people Jesus referred to here. "These brothers of [His]" are *Christians*. See Matt. 28:10; John 20:17; Rom. 8:29; and Heb. 2:11-18. Christ identifies, in a very special way, with His disciples (cf. Acts 9:5; 1 Cor. 8:12; and 12:27). As I mentioned, the saints (true Israel), now judged, resurrected/transformed, glorified, and reigning, are present with the Lord Jesus Christ when He judges the nations; they are the brothers He refers to. As I mentioned, one of the most important points of this passage, if not the most important point, is Christ's loving concern for His brothers/disciples.

Note that the King is speaking to the sheep here. His "brothers" weren't the sheep, or those of the sheep who had been in need, or those of the sheep and goats combined who had been in need. Although many disagree, the sheep aren't Christians. Christians wouldn't be surprised, or respond as the sheep do here in Matt. 25:37-39. When Christians extend mercy to other Christians, they do it first, and foremost, with Jesus Christ in mind, and for Him. They not only love Him (as their Savior and their Lord), but they also know they have been commanded by Him to love one another (cf., e.g., John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; 17:20-23; Gal. 6:10; James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:13-24; and 4:7-5:2). Furthermore, they know that they will be judged according to their works, and that they will be rejected for unfaithfulness, disobedience, lawlessness (cf., e.g., Matt. 24:45-25:30). It's also true that when Christians extend mercy to non-Christians, they do it with Christ in mind.

Matthew 10:40-42 (especially 10:42) are an important cross-reference regarding rewards for extending mercy to the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 10:40 says, "He who receives you receives Me, and He who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." Then Matt. 10:41, 42 (NIV) say, "Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. (42) And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple [Cf. Mark 9:41. In the

margin of Matt. 10:42, the NASB has “i.e., humble” to help explain “little ones.” The BAGD Greek Lexicon (under the adjective translated “little ones”) says it means to be small “in esteem, importance, influence, power, etc.” “Little ones” here in Matt. 10:42 apparently refer to the most insignificant Christian disciples, but the words can apply to all Christians (cf. Mark 9:41, 42; Luke 17:1, 2).] I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” No act of kindness extended to Christian disciples because they are disciples of Christ goes unnoticed by Christ/God; it will be rewarded.

These words of Matt. 10:40-42 are all the more understandable in context with all of Matthew chapter 10, which speaks of the difficulties that Christians would often face as they took the gospel throughout the cities of Israel. Matthew 10:11-15 speak of the apostles being dependent (in God’s plan) on the support of the people in the places they minister. Those who receive them as messengers of Christ and support them will be rewarded; those who reject them (and their message) will be cursed. Matthew 10:40, 41 fit well in a missionary context like this (not that 10:40, 41 need be limited to a missionary context), but 10:42 seems to cover any act of kindness done (with the right motive) in behalf of any Christian in need.

A dominant point (an exciting point) that permeates Matt. 10:40-42 and 25:34-40 is that the Lord Jesus Christ (and beyond Him God the Father) loves His disciples, and He is concerned about them in a very special way, so much so that there will be substantial rewards for those who extend mercy to them because they are His disciples. Matthew 10:40-42 make it clear that the extending of kindness to Christ’s disciples because they are His disciples is what is in view here, and I believe we can see the same principle at work in Matt. 25:34-40.

It’s important to see that the good works these sheep did for Christ’s brothers flowed from what was in their heart. We couldn’t say that they had faith in Christ (in the full new-covenant sense, as born-again Christians), but we can probably say they had faith in God/Christ, at least in some ways, and to some extent. Why didn’t they become Christians? This question isn’t answered for us here; it seems to go beyond the scope of this passage, which is, as I mentioned, quite abbreviated and simplified. We can’t say that these sheep were totally separate from contact with Christians (and the gospel) in that they extended mercy to Christians. At the same time, we can’t put these sheep in the category of those who have rejected the gospel. (Much Scripture shows that those who willfully reject the gospel will not be saved.) However, just because people have met Christians and are attracted to their God doesn’t necessarily mean that they have rejected the gospel if they haven’t become born-again Christians.

For one thing, I leave room for the idea that God didn’t choose these people to be part of true Israel, but part of the nations. I’ll leave the details with God; I know He’ll do all things in a perfect way. I’m sure that when He is done with His work, and we are living in the super-glorious eternal state pictured in Revelation chapters 21, 22, all of us in God’s eternal kingdom (true Israel and the elect of the nations) will stand in total awe of God as we see the full outworking of His super-glorious plan of salvation and the full manifestation of His glory and grace (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 2:9; Rom. 11:33-36).] **(41) Then He will also say to those on His left [the goats of 25:32, 33], “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels [(On the devil’s angels, cf. Rev. 12:4, 7-9. On the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels, cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8; also see Matt. 3:10, 12; 5:22;**

7:19; 13:40, 42, 50; and 18:8, 9.) Based on these words, we can probably say that the eternal fire was originally prepared for the devil and his angels after their rebellion, not for man; however, it seems we must also say that God knew from the foundation of the world what part of mankind would eventually share this fate with the devil through following him in his rebellion (cf., e.g., Matt. 25:34).]; **(42) for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; (43) I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.” (44) Then they themselves also will answer, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?” (45) Then He will answer them, saying, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these [referring to His brothers, as 25:40 shows], you did not do it to Me.” (46) And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous [On the “righteous,” see under 25:37.] into eternal life.”** [In this context, with the “eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (25:41) and the “eternal punishment” (25:46), “eternal life” (25:46) speaks of the eternal life in God’s eternal kingdom pictured in Revelation chapters 21, 22. (Those from the nations living in the millennial kingdom won’t experience eternal life at that time.) These chapters of Revelation (the last two chapters of the Bible) put much emphasis on the entrance of the nations into God’s new heaven and new earth, with it’s new Jerusalem. Emphasis is also put on the fact that God’s true Israel is reigning with God in new Jerusalem when the nations enter. The raptured saints will have begun to reign at the time of the mid-week rapture, and all the members of true Israel will have been reigning throughout the millennium. What a destiny!]