

**Matthew 24:29–31**

The pinnacle of the tribulation period is now brought into focus by Jesus in the next few verses. He says “immediately after the tribulation of those days” there will be certain cosmic signs associated with His coming. Notice that He begins His discussion on His return at the end of Daniel’s seventieth week by quoting from Isaiah 13. Isaiah 13 is a mixed prophecy concerning God’s judgment on Babylon, but it also includes His final judgment during the Day of the Lord. Consider the characteristics of the prophecy that are highlighted in Isaiah 13: vs. 9 – He will exterminate sinners, vs. 10 – Stellar object will go dark, vs. 11 – Punish the world (not just Babylon) for its evil, vs. 11 – Put an end to the arrogance of the proud, vs. 12 – Make mortal men more scarce than gold, vs. 13 – heavens tremble and the earth shaken from its place.

This doesn’t sound like what happened in 70 AD does it? Then the “sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky ...” What is this sign? It may be that the sign of the Son of Man IS the viewing of the Second Coming by the entire planet. But it may also be something totally distinct from His coming. There is nothing in the text that hints at what this sign might be, only that it occurs after the cosmic signs and the powers of the heavens being shaken. Then we have the tribes of the earth mourning. What would this refer to?

Given the language, Jesus is certainly referring to Zechariah 12:9–14.

<sup>9</sup> "And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. <sup>11</sup> "In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. <sup>12</sup> "The land will mourn, every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; <sup>13</sup> the family of the house of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself and their wives by themselves; <sup>14</sup> all the families that remain, every family by itself and their wives by themselves.

One of the major prophetic events that will come to pass at the Second Coming will be the conversion of the remaining Jews to the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. When they look upon Him at the Second Coming, they will suddenly realize that it is Christ Himself who is their Jewish Messiah, that they have pierced Him when they crucified Him on the cross, and they will then mourn as they realize they have rejected their Messiah for all these years ... that entire generations of Jews have been lost due to unbelief, and they will as a nation and people repent and mourn over this sin of rejecting their king ... and that mourning will be like a mother losing a first born son. Revelation 1:7 gives us one more detail concerning this Second Coming of Christ ... “every eye will see Him.” This is why the remnant Jews are not to go looking for the Christ among those who are false during the tribulation, because His coming will be a world-wide event. Every person alive at the time (and I believe every person who has died) will see Jesus Christ at His second coming. This puts the final nail into Preterism. Every eye did not see Him in 70 AD, the Jews did not repent in 70 AD, they did not mourn over Him in 70 AD; they were scattered and have remained in unbelief to this day. This event will be with “power and great glory.” Recall the angel that came to the tomb, his mere presence caused a massive earthquake (Matt 24:2). Imagine the power of the risen Christ descending to earth in His second coming. The brilliance of that appearing will be reminiscent of the Transfiguration.

**Matthew 24:31 Jewish Regathering**

The final thought from the Olivet Discourse to His disciples is the regathering in verse 31.

And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER THE TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Many well-meaning believers of the take this verse as proof of the post-tribulation rapture ... namely, Jesus comes in the clouds in His second coming, then raptures the elect. They would see the elect as church saints here. If this view is correct, it would mean that the church would go through the entire seven-year tribulation period; which would be a direct contradiction of 1 Thessalonians 5:9 ... “For God has not destined us for wrath ...” where the wrath in this passage cannot mean ‘hell,’ it must refer to the wrath associated with the Day of the Lord (the context of 1 Thess. 5).

What could this gathering of the elect refer to? Several factors lead us to conclude the elect are the remnant Jews who will be saved at the Second Coming. The term elect, as we have previously noted in Matthew refers to elect Jews. It is a fact of Scripture that the term 'elect' is not a strictly NT construct that refers to elect Christians, for church saints. Many passages in the OT teach that national Israel is God's elect. Consider, for example, Deuteronomy 7:6 ...

"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

The word translated "holy" here means "set apart, consecrated." Many places in Deuteronomy established that God had chosen the people of Israel over all the other Gentile nations to be His people. In Isaiah 45:4 God calls the nation "Israel My elect," (KJV), but rendered 'My chosen' in some other translations. Paul, in Romans 11:28–29, stated that although Israel had disobeyed and rebelled against God, Israel was still His beloved, elect nation. The question of whether Israel is still elect of God is a point of debate among Christian scholars. Yet the Abrahamic covenant established Israel as God's elect nation for all time.

Jesus description of the gathering of the elect "from the four winds" would be recognized by Jews for several reasons:

First, because of Israel's continued rebellion, God has promised to scatter the Jewish people ... consider the judgment declaration by Ezekiel in chapter 5 ...

<sup>10</sup> ... for I will execute judgments on you and scatter all your remnant to every wind. <sup>11</sup> 'So as I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye will have no pity and I will not spare. <sup>12</sup> 'One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.

Similar depictions are taught in Ezekiel 17:21 and Zechariah 2:6. The 'four winds' is an apt depiction of the four cardinal directions on a map, thus indicating that this scattering by God would be over the entire world. This is one of the main judgments that God promised to bring upon Israel for disobedience. God has scattered the Jewish people throughout the entire world to this day. In fact, there are more Jews living outside Israel than within it today.

Second, God promised to gather His nation Israel in the future. In Isaiah 43:5–7, He promises to gather Israel from the east, west, north, and south, "from the ends of the earth." In the context of this promise God calls His people "His chosen," (Isaiah 43:10,20).

Third, Jesus declaration that His angels will gather His elect "from one end of heaven to the other." Moses also foretold this gathering in Deuteronomy 30:4–5 ... <sup>4</sup> "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. <sup>5</sup> The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers."

Finally, Jesus indicated His elect will be gathered from the four corners of the earth in conjunction with the blast of a great trumpet. Isaiah predicted this ...

<sup>12</sup> In that day the LORD will start *His* threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel. <sup>13</sup> It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

Do you see why the study of the OT is critically important to eschatology. Without these passages on the gathering of Israel at the sound of the trumpet, we would be tempted to associate this trumpet with the "last trumpet" that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15 concerning the rapture of the church. Indeed, this is how these alternate views of eschatology are introduced; with a faulty theological method that begins in the NT.

### **Matthew 24:32–33**

Jesus then gives to his disciples a few parables concerning His second coming, the first of which is the parable of the fig tree.

Learn the parable of the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near;

Many expositors understandably see this parable as pertaining to the nation of Israel. Showers<sup>1</sup> explains

Some sincere Christians believe the fig tree represents Israel. They espouse that the tender branch putting forth leaves represents Israel's rebirth as a modern nation in its God-given homeland in 1948. But if this were true, that generation would not pass away before Christ's return and the end of the present pre-Messianic age. ... some claimed that 40 years equals a generation, and Christ would return by 1988. But 1988 ... came and went.

This seems like a reasonable view in light of Jesus explanation of the parable in the following verse ...

so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.

You see, verse 32 and 33 go together as a unit; a parable followed by explanation. And the explanation is very straightforward ... when you see "all these things," know the His coming is near. What constitutes "all these things?" Everything He has said in Matthew 24! The birth pangs, the abomination of desolation, the cosmic signs, ... all of these things. When you see these things, you know His coming is near. It's that simple ... there is no deep, symbolic, spiritual or fanciful interpretation needed for a parable that is explained by Jesus. The purpose of the parable is to point to Christ's imminent return and the sudden coming of the kingdom. Furthermore, the parallel section of Luke is explicit ...

<sup>29</sup> Then He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup> as soon as they put forth *leaves*, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. <sup>31</sup> "So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.

#### **Matthew 24:34 This generation ...**

We now come to the most controversial verse of the entire discourse in Matthew 24; the meaning 'this generation.' What is apparently obvious to me is that many people interpret the entire Olivet Discourse in light of their understanding of this one verse. They read the text of Matthew 24:34 literally, and take 'this generation' as the one alive during the time of Christ; then they are required to go back and reinterpret all of Matthew 24:1–33 with verse 34 as an impenetrable guiding interpretive framework. They have in fact replaced a hermeneutically solid eschatology framework from Daniel and the rest of the OT and replaced it with an artificial construction from this one verse. Since none of the events (for example, the abomination of desolation, cosmic signs, etc.) happened in 70 AD, they are forced to switch to an allegorical or symbolic method that tries to shoehorn historical events around the time of 70 AD into the text as fulfillment. This is an absolutely inexcusable theological and interpretive blunder that has given birth to entire eschatological schemes that are heretical.

There are at least 7 views on the meaning of 'this generation.'

1. Jesus misspoke or was mistaken in His understanding
2. Christ meant the entire human race in general
3. Christ was referring to the generation alive in His lifetime (preterism)
4. Christ was referring to faithful Christians in general
5. This generation refers to the Jewish race
6. This generation refers to a future evil generation
7. This generation refers to a future generation which will be alive during His second coming

Of these 7, only the last 3 have merit. While it is possible that, according to view 5, 'this generation' could refer to the Jewish race as a people, we will have the additional burden of explaining how 'this generation' is going to 'pass away.' Our problem here in seeing the entire Jewish race is that we know from the Abrahamic covenant that the existence of the Jewish race is eternal, forever; it is inconceivable that the Jewish race would pass away.

Let's consider view 6. Recall Jesus words at the end of Matthew 23, which acts as a continuing theme into Matthew 24. He mentions that judgment for the blood of the prophets will fall upon 'this generation.' Now when we discussed this verse, we

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<sup>1</sup> Showers, Renald E., *The Sign of His Coming, Understanding the Olivet Discourse*, The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Bellmawr, NJ, 2016.

noted that Jesus was viewing 'you' in 23:35 as a collective, representative 'you.' They did not actually kill the prophets, but they were a generation that was representative of an evil unbelieving generation that killed the prophets and would soon reject the Lord Jesus and put Him to death. This view understands 'generation' in 24:34 in that same sense of referring to the category of rebellious, sinful people who have rejected God's truth and righteousness in 23:36. Now we have no issue with 'this generation' passing away; they will be taken away in judgment at the second coming.

What about the 7<sup>th</sup> view; 'this generation' being those alive in the future during the time of His second coming? Again, if those alive during His second coming 'pass away,' what about those rescued as per Daniel 12:1? This is probably the majority view of dispensational theologians.

I want to now suggest an 8<sup>th</sup> view, which is a combination of views 6 and 7 that fully answer all the questions in the text.

The weakness of view 6 is that the future generation is characterized by its rebellion, but there is not a time frame associated with when this generation will occur. It will just be a future evil generation. The weakness of view 7 is that there must be survivors to be saved, so the generation alive at the time of Christ's return cannot ALL pass away.

I think the best view is a combination of view 6 and 7 in that 'this generation' will be those Jews alive during the events surrounding the Second Coming which represent rebellious evil Jews that will be destroyed. This handles all the details in the text and it specifies that time frame that this generation will live in. Jesus was referring to the future generation of rebellious Jews who will be alive at His second coming.

This interpretation will also fit with the next few verses concerning the days of Noah being like the days of the Son of Man.

#### **Matthew 24:35**

Finally, Jesus gives us a simple illustration of the truthfulness of what He has just spoken. Jesus tells us that heaven and earth will (someday) pass away; but His words will never pass away. In this context, what He has spoken of in Matthew 24 will surely come to pass as the heavens and earth will one day pass away.