

# Matthew Chapter 24-25 – The Olivet Discourse – Part 12

## Critique of The Rapture View in Matthew 24:32-51

### Introduction

There is a contingent within Bible churches that teach that Jesus is informing the disciples that there will be a rapture before the tribulation. The main proponents of this are decent theologians, and I believe very well intended.

Their theological conclusion is something that I agree with (the rapture is before the tribulation), but the question is about a proper interpretation and the method that we use to get to that conclusion.

In November 2020, there was an article published that laid out a consolidated argument for “proofs” that the rapture is taught in Matthew 24. The author gave credit to two other theologians for influencing him and both theologians are very well respected. The article is titled *The Rapture in Matthew 24? Nine Proofs*.

### Their Argument

#1- The Lord gives many signs for the event described in Matt 24:4-31. Thus, you can know when the event is happening. But the Rapture, while imminent, is a sign-less event. Hence, when the Lord says, “of that day and hour no one knows...” (Matt 24:36), He must be referring to the Rapture, not to the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation.

#2 - The words *now concerning* (peri de) start v 36 and indicate that a new idea is being discussed.

#3 - *The words that day and hour* (v 36) refer to the start of the day of the Lord, that is, the Rapture. And *that day and hour* is distinguished from references to *those days* (plural) in the prior section (i.e., Matt 24:19, 22, 29).

#4 - The Lord’s reference to the days of Noah (Matt 24:37-39) fits perfectly with an imminent event whose time is unknown. But it does not fit with someone being in a period of seven years with identifiable signs, including a sign that the mid-point has been reached (i.e., the abomination of desolation). Things before the flood were business as usual in Noah’s day, and they will be business as usual at the time of the Rapture as well.

#5 - A comparison between Matt 24:40-44 and Paul’s words in 1 Thess 5:1-11 shows that the pre-trib Rapture is in view in Matthew 24. Paul picks up the Lord’s thief in the night imagery and refers to the day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:2). Paul indicates that people will be saying “peace and safety” (1 Thess 5:3) when the day of the Lord starts, then “sudden destruction” will come upon them (1 Thess 5:3). They will not escape that time of wrath (1 Thess 5:3). But believers will be saved from the Tribulation wrath (1 Thess 5:9-10).

#6 - Peter’s words in 1 Pet 3:20-21 and 2 Pet 3:10 show that the pre-trib Rapture was in view in Matthew 24. In 1 Pet 3:20-21, Peter talks about the time of Noah and his family being saved from the wrath of the flood via the ark. That salvation was not regeneration, but a type of the Rapture of the Church. In 2 Pet 3:10-12, Peter uses the Lord’s image of the thief in the night to refer to the soon return of Christ, which will culminate in the destruction of the current heavens and the earth and the creation of a new heavens and earth.

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#7 - The reference to *one will be taken* naturally fits with the pre-trib Rapture. And those left behind (remember the Tim LaHaye books by that title?) naturally refer to unbelievers who are not delivered but must go through the Tribulation. Hart notes, “If the one ‘taken’ is taken away for judgment, it is peculiar that a word characterized by personal accompaniment is employed while the one ‘left’ to enter the kingdom is described with a word frequently used for the forsaken” (JOTGES, Autumn 2008: 47). The language most naturally suggests that the ones taken refer to those taken in the Rapture.

#8 - The imagery of a thief in the night fits perfectly with the pre-trib Rapture. But it does not fit at all with those who have been left behind to go through the Tribulation. Once the man of sin signs a covenant with Israel, anyone who reads the Bible can see that day one of 2,520 days has begun. When the two witnesses are killed, there will be 1,260 days before the Second Coming. Jesus’ Second Coming will not be like a thief in the night for anyone who has read God’s Word. Hart says, “There can be no forewarning if we are to honor the surprise element resident in the thief analogy in 24:43. A thief does not willingly signal his presence, but numerous telltale signs will precede Christ’s Second Coming at the climax of the tribulation” (JOTGES, Autumn 2008: 51).

#9 - The exhortation to *watch* (grēgoreō) absolutely shows that the Pre-trib Rapture is in view in both Matthew 24 and 1 Thess 5:1-11. Hart writes, “If pre-tribulationists agree that 1 Thess 5 uses grēgoreō to instruct believers of the NT church to ‘stay alert’ for the coming pre-tribulational Rapture, then isn’t it logical that Jesus could have utilized the same word in the same way in the Olivet Discourse?” (JOTGES, Autumn 2008: 57).

### Evaluation

#1- Matthew 24:36 – Does the phrase *no one knows* indicate that this cannot be about the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation? To be able to conclude this, we would have to disconnect from the entire flow of Matthew and especially its entire context. It is possible that the Hebrew train of thought backtracks to a previous point, but going back to information previous to the entire context does not make any literary sense.

Some believe these verses answer the question, “What is the sign of your coming?” But we have verses 29-31 that speak of the coming of the Son of Man.

We need to ask the question: Will people know the day or the hour of the second coming of Jesus? No. Why not? Three possibilities for this answer.

1. Because just like in Noah’s time, they did not understand until the day came. Just as the previous parable states, there will be some who understand the season but not the day.
2. Nobody knew at that time. It doesn’t say nobody will ever know. The reason that even Jesus does not know is because the time of the Tribulation has not started yet, and it is not to be figured out. But we also know that the timing of the Lord’s return is specific, marked by the signing of a seven-year peace treaty and the abomination of desolation. The conclusion is that it is not for anybody to know until it has been revealed (Acts 1:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3). There is also another, see point #3.

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#2 - The words *now concerning* (peri de) means “now concerning.” This does not mean that the subject is changing (Matthew 20:1-6, 22:29-32, 27:44-46). It would appear that Matthew uses this pairing to redirect attention to particular information.

#3 – Do the words *that day and hour* (v 36) refer to the start of the day of the Lord, and is the start of the day of the Lord the Rapture? Here, I do think that “the day and the hour” refer to the day of the Lord. But according to Daniel, what sets off the final seven-year period? Not the Rapture but the signing of the treaty. Joining this point with point #1, we can see that the day of the Lord will be missed; nobody will see it coming. The day of the Lord is not the Rapture; the day of the Lord is first typified by the day of judgment.

Many think the Rapture will be some worldwide cataclysmic event that will kick off the Tribulation. My theory is that the Rapture will be explained away; it will be dismissed, and those in Judea, even those who become believers after the Rapture, will not see the day of the Lord coming. All of a sudden, they are going to realize the seals have been opened.

#4 – I agree that the reference to the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37-39) fits perfectly with an imminent event whose time is unknown. But the author states that it does not fit with someone being in a period of seven years with identifiable signs, including a sign that the mid-point has been reached (i.e., the abomination of desolation). First of all, this is not the point Jesus is making. But if taking his point, we can make an observation: Noah was building and witnessing for 120 years, and nobody paid any heed to it.

Day-to-day life before the flood was business as usual in Noah’s day, and it will be business as usual before the day of the Lord. Will the Rapture also be sudden and unexpected? Yes, but just because two events are similar does not mean they are the same thing.

#5 – The language is similar, but Paul deals with the day of the Lord, not the Rapture. We can also see that the Rapture and the day of the Lord are held as separate events in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3.

#6 - 1 Peter 3:20-21; 2 Peter 3:10 – I have no idea what the author is doing here. To claim that the ark is a type of the Rapture of the Church is an allegorical interpretation and moves away from the plain literal meaning of the text. Salvation does not refer to regeneration, but it is not a type. In 2 Peter 3:10-12, Peter uses the Lord’s image of the thief in the night to refer to the day of the Lord and destruction will come upon the Earth. The Rapture is not mentioned in these texts.

The full context of 1 Peter 3:20-22 states that “baptism saves you” in comparison to those who were saved during days of Noah. This is about the preservation/effectiveness of our lives, not about reconciliation or Rapture.

#7 – The argument that “one taken” refers to the Rapture does not fit the context.

Some have opined that the one taken is for judgment; this does not seem to fit either. The context of Matthew 24:31 fits the best and refers to the gathering of the Remnant.

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#8 – I agree that the imagery of a thief in the night fits perfectly with the pre-trib Rapture. But it also fits with the unexpected and sudden effect of the day of the Lord.

To repeat an earlier point, Israel, even post-rapture believers, will not recognize that the day of the Lord has commenced until they are already in it. The context of the coming of the Lord is all the events that precede the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds (Matthew).

#9 - The exhortation (*grēgoreō - be on the alert*) is used 22 times in the New Testament. It is improper to state that this imperative is exclusive to believers watching for the Rapture. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, we see that Paul contrasts those who will be caught off guard in the coming day of the Lord, but we are not like them; we have an expectation of salvation, and we will not be in the day of the Lord.

### **Conclusion**

The reason that we need to make this distinction is because it relates to a growing problem with those who understand that eternal life is by grace through faith alone. Many have come to this knowledge through people and ministries but have not learned a biblical hermeneutic. If we follow their logic, then we would have to take the parables are about the Rapture, and this would lead to a very wrong conclusion – punitive damages for the Church who are not ready.

For this remaining portion of Matthew 24:32-25:46, we will use the Literal, Grammatical, Historical Method and make sure we keep it in the context of Matthew. We must not bring our understanding of the Church into this text.

The Parable of the Fig Tree

The Days of Noah

One Taken One Left

Be on the Alert/Be Ready

Faithful and Wicked Slave

Ten Virgins

Slaves who Invest Talents

Outer Darkness

All of these topics are about Israel and getting prepared during the day of the Lord and the judgment of Jesus Christ when He returns as the Messiah King.