

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 28

KINGDOM PROPHECY, PART 9: MATTHEW 24:31

NOTE: Due to a technical malfunction, the previous lesson was not recorded so the portion of it pertaining to Matthew 24:31 is repeated here.

The Bible clearly says there will be a Kingdom and it will be the Kingdom predicted by the prophets for Israel. The Jewish people will be gathered back into the land when Christ returns at His Second Coming. This is based on the promises of the Land Covenant (Dt. 30:1-10).

Matthew 24:31 ³¹“And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT [μέγας] TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER [ἐπισυνάγω] TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Deuteronomy 30:1–5 ¹“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, ²and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, ³then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴“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. ⁵“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.

Who are the elect in Matthew 24:31? We know the church is not part of the discussion in the Olivet Discourse and Israel is the subject of the prophecies; therefore, the elect must be the believing remnant of Israelites who have been scattered throughout the world during the persecution of the antichrist as the Tribulation unfolds during Daniel's seventieth week. Right now we are examining the King and His Kingdom so will deal with the events of the Tribulation later.

Anyone who replaces Israel with the church, and that is just about every theologian and every theological system except premillennial dispensationalists, cannot correctly understand the meaning of this Scripture. They inevitably place the church in it and/or they apply it to this age culminating in the Second Coming. They also deny the literal fulfillment of the Land Covenant or they claim it was fulfilled from Joshua to Solomon and therefore is no longer in effect.

Here is how Replacement theologian Campbell interprets Matthew 24:31. "This prediction has reference first of all to an event that is now past. The event—the *sending out* of the gospel heralds—took place nineteen hundred years ago. The ingathering is still in progress and will continue until the last trumpet sounds. If we erroneously assume that the trumpet spoken of here is the last trump, and that the gathering here referred to is at the end of history and time, then we must look for a fulfillment which lies wholly in the future, whereas a closer study will reveal that this sending of the messengers is already, as regards its inauguration, a fulfilled prediction." [Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, p. 172].

This is a very uninformed commentary on Matthew 24:31 concerning the dispensational understanding of it. He does not believe there will be a literal, on earth Kingdom; therefore, he has to see this Scripture as partially fulfilled at Pentecost and as being fulfilled throughout this age. He begins his exegesis with the faulty presupposition there is no literal Kingdom. He also incorrectly calls the trumpet the "last" trumpet. The problem is the Greek text does not say that. The Greek text says the trumpet is a μέγας trumpet meaning great. The word refers to the upper range of a scale of extent with the possible implication of importance in relevant contexts; it does not mean "last." Some translations (Revised Standard Version, Holman Christian Standard Bible, and the NET Bible) translate it as a "loud" trumpet. Despite Campbell's claim, no dispensationalist believes this to be the "last trumpet." No dispensationalist says this Scripture is referring to the end of history and time. Actually, we know this to be the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom; therefore, it cannot refer to the end of history and of time. This man's understanding of Matthew 24:31 is biblically erroneous, theologically erroneous, and in error concerning dispensational theology. He at least ought to take the time to research what we actually believe and say about these things before taking us to task over things we don't believe and have never written. This is called a straw man argument. In this case, it would be more accurate to simply call it dishonest because he does not quote any dispensationalist confirming what he claims we believe. We do say this Scripture refers to events wholly in the future but not for the reasons he claims we do.

Non-dispensationalists believe Matthew 24:31 is referring to gathering the Church. John Calvin displayed that understanding in his commentary on the gospels. "*And he shall send his angels. He describes the effect of his power, that he will send his angels to gather his elect from the most distant parts of the world; for by the extremity of heaven is meant the most distant region. But Christ speaks hyperbolically, in order to show that the elect, even though they were carried away from the earth and scattered in the air, will again be gathered, so to be united in the enjoyment of eternal life under Him as their head, and enjoy the expected inheritance; for Christ intended to console his disciples, that they might not be altogether discouraged by the lamentable dispersion of the Church. Whenever, therefore, we perceive the Church scattered by the wiles of Satan, or torn in pieces by the cruelty of the ungodly, or disturbed by false doctrines, or tossed about by storms, let us learn to turn our eyes to this gathering of the elect. And if*

it appear to us a thing difficult to be believed, let us call to remembrance the power of *the angels*, which Christ holds out to us for the express purpose of raising our views above human means. For, though the Church be now tormented by the malice of men, or even broken by the violence of the billows, and miserably torn in pieces, so as to have no stability in the world, yet we ought always to cherish confident hope, because it will not be by human means, but by heavenly power, which will be far superior to every obstacle, that the Lord will *gather* his Church. [John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 3:148].

Make no mistake concerning this issue; one of the reasons people do not want to see Israel in these prophetic Scriptures is anti-Semitism. Allis, mentioned by Campbell as writing a "scholarly work," provides a sterling example of anti-Semitic prejudice disguised as Christian theology. "For the more literally these prophecies are construed, the more thoroughly and pervasively Jewish will be the millennium to which the Millenarian will look forward with keen anticipation.... What this means is illustrated very clearly by such a verse as Isa. Lx. 21 [Is. 60:21], 'They people also shall be righteous.' Thousands of Christians of every age of the Church have claimed this promise. They have regarded these words as including themselves. They have held that 'thy people' means God's people, His elect of every age and race and condition. They have regarded it as a prophecy of the Church. But according to Dispensationalists 'thy people' means Israel; and in the millennium 'the kingdom will be restored to Israel.' The Jews will be again pre-eminent among the nations; they will again be God's people in a unique sense. The nations will be held in subjection by the rod-of-iron rule of Messiah. This conception of the future can be reconciled with the teachings of Paul that all distinctions between Jew and Gentile have been broken down by the Gospel, if indeed the word reconciled can be used at all in such a connection, only by recognizing that the millennial age will follow the Church age and be quite distinct from it. In a word, the earthly Davidic kingdom which entered the New Testament 'absolutely unchanged,' which was offered to the Jews and rejected by them, will at the second advent be given to them 'absolutely unchanged.' The millennium will be a Jewish age!" [Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy & the Church*, pp. 242, 244-245].

Isaiah 60:21 ²¹"Then all your people will be righteous; They will possess the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified.

A Messianic theologian once remarked that he didn't think Reformed theology was necessarily anti-Semitic on its face, but it wasn't uncomfortable with it either. Based on what some of them write and some of the Reformed denominations' attitudes towards Israel today, it seems they may be more than comfortable with anti-Semitism.

The context of Isaiah 60 is the glories of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. It is error for Christians to see themselves as God's people in v. 21. Context matters! Allis knows and admits the literal meaning of these Scriptures is just what the dispensational theologians says it is but he cannot allow that literal meaning to stand. He replaces Israel with the

church and that's why he thinks he can reinterpret Isaiah 60:21 to be a reference to the church. The church, according to him, is God's people from all ages Adam to the end of history. Notice that Allis connects the pejorative word "pervasive" with a restored Israelite state. Pervasive means "an unwelcome influence or physical effect spreading widely throughout an area or a group of people." [*The Oxford American College Dictionary*, s.v. "pervasive"].

On the other hand, dispensationalists realize that Israel is the subject of the prophecy in Matthew 24:31. "This event will have special meaning for Israel. Jesus will return at that hour when Israel is about to be defeated by the Gentile armies. He will rescue His people, and they will see Him and recognize that He is their Messiah. There will be a national repentance, national cleansing, and national restoration under the gracious leadership of their Messiah." [Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 1:89].

The only conflict among dispensational theologians is whether or not the elect refers to only Jewish believers or to Gentile Tribulation believers as well. Wiersbe believes it refers to both groups. Barbieri believes the elect refers to both groups and he also believes the resurrection of the Old Testament saints occurs at this time. [Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 78]. Either way, this still does not refer to the church. Tribulation believers are not part of the church. Whatever category of believer they are, they are not the church.

The word ἐπισυνάγω meaning "gather" in Matthew 24:31 is used by the Septuagint to refer to the specific regathering of Israel at the end of Psalm 106 and it pertains to end times events. This may not be a solid connection between the Scriptures but it is there and it is interesting to contemplate anyway. In other words, we can't just simply say that because a word is used on one context that it means the same in other Scriptures, but the end times context in them is similar. They are used in an eschatological, end times gathering aspect.

Psalm 106:47 ⁴⁷Save us, O LORD our God, And gather [צָרָה, ἐπισυνάγω] us from among the nations, To give thanks to Your holy name And glory in Your praise.

The context of Psalm 106:40-48 is God's anger is kindled against His people (v. 40) and He gave them over to the nations who ruled over them and oppressed them (vv. 41-42). He would deliver them but they remained sinful and rebellious (v. 43). But God heard their cry and remembered His covenant with them, relented, and had compassion on them (vv. 44-46). They request to be saved and gathered out of the nations (v. 47). The word for "gathered" is the same word used in Matthew 24:31 for the command to "gather" the elect from all over the earth.

Most dispensational theologians understand Matthew 24:31 as a Scripture referring to the gathering of Jews dispersed in the Tribulation back into the land. This time they are

gathered in belief and they will live as redeemed people safely and securely in Israel with the Messiah serving as the Davidic King in Jerusalem. The context of the Olivet Discourse argues against understanding anyone but the Jewish elect in the verse. The church is not in the Olivet Discourse; it pertains to Israel only.

That is exactly Fruchtenbaum's argument. "As for the gathering of the elect of verse 31, the same context still limits the elect to the Jewish elect." [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 218].

Isaiah addressed this issue in Isaiah 66.

Isaiah 66:7-9⁷"Before she travailed, she brought forth; Before her pain came, she gave birth to a boy. ⁸"Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a land be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth all at once? As soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons. ⁹"Shall I bring to the point of birth and not give delivery?" says the LORD. "Or shall I who gives delivery shut the womb?" says your God.

Most people use this prophecy to affirm the establishment of Israel as an official world state on one day, the day the United Nations voted to recognize the Israeli state, in May 1948, but that is not correct. While the Jewish people have undergone trials, persecutions, and holocausts since the diaspora, the travails spoken of by Isaiah have yet to happen. Only then, at the Second Coming of Christ and the gathering of the Jewish elect, will the land be born in a day, brought forth all at once.

"The metaphor used in v. 7 in which a birth occurs with no pain symbolizes the coming restoration of Jerusalem that will require no effort by the people (v. 8). Interestingly, the Targum (ancient rabbinic paraphrase) renders the final line of this verse as 'her king will be revealed,' which suggests a messianic reading referring to what happens immediately following the second coming of Christ." [Michael Rydelnik and James Spence, "Isaiah" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, pp. 1100-1101].

Over the years I've noticed that Replacement theologians simply ignore inconvenient Scriptures that have Israel as the subject. Isaiah 66:7-9 is one of them. It doesn't matter whether it's commentaries, systematic theology texts, or topical books on prophecy they just don't address these Scriptures. Postmillennials simply interpret this Scripture to mean the church or the Kingdom of God is going to be triumphant in the end. Mathison claims Isaiah 66 refers to "a worldwide conversion of all nations and tongues.... According to postmillennialism, the messianic kingdom is fundamentally redemptive. Its primary purpose is to redeem and restore mankind and creation." [Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*, pp. 100, 191]. He uses Isaiah 66 as his proof text for making these claims.

The other option is the interpretations assigned to this Scripture are little more than gibberish. Here is an example. "The marvelous deliverance of the repentant remnant is

here predicted. The unbelieving majority jeer at sincere Bible believers, challenging their God to display his glory by a miracle of deliverance or of vengeance, if he can. Jehovah's answer to the challenge will come as the Chaldean besiegers tumultuously storm the walls of Jerusalem (v. 6). In the 'last days' (beginning at Pentecost) that remnant was to multiply speedily into a great and numerous people as the Gospel was preached. And without the protracted birth pangs of parturition [the act of giving birth; childbirth], the far-flung commonwealth of the Christian Church would spring up all over the Roman Empire within a single generation." [*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 653].

Israel as we know it did not become a land in a day. Theodor Herzl officially began the Zionist movement in the nineteenth century, but there had always been Jewish people in the land of Israel. Pogroms in Russia in the early twentieth century caused many Jews to move to Israel. Many of these Jews purchased land from the Arabs at highly inflated prices. The Arabs thought the land to be worthless and believed they were taking advantage of the foolish Jews. But the Jews turned parts of that "worthless" land into productive agricultural land. It has been said that World War I prepared the land for the people and that World War II prepared the people for the land. The British liberated Israel from the Turkish Ottoman Empire and the Balfour Declaration gave the Jews the right to establish a national home in the land after World War I. World War II made many Jews realize what Herzl had realized decades before: the only place Jews could be secure, live a life of peace, and prevent future holocausts would be in their own land. It hasn't exactly worked out that way, but it will and Matthew 24:31 is the culmination of Israel's restoration.

Paul also addressed the issue of Zion being delivered out of the nations and saved. He added the element of the spiritual significance to the establishment of Zion which is an obvious reference to the New Covenant made with Israel and with Judah.

Romans 11:25–27 ²⁵For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." ²⁷"THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

Toussaint also believes the elect refers to Jewish believers gathered at the end of the Tribulation. There is no exegetical reason to understand the word "elect" to be referring only to the church as so many theologians do. The issue of the "elect" was discussed in depth in the Soteriology series of classes but elect refers to those in Christ who are His choice ones rather than His chosen ones. The Hebrew word, בְּחִירָה, means to choose; it can refer to one preferred or related. Relationship is the focus when Israel is the subject and it almost always carries theological overtones in the Old Testament particularly when it is used in connection with Israel. Yahweh did not choose Israel and appoint them to His service, He created Israel to be His instrument of revelation to the world. In that sense, Israel is His choice nation and not His chosen nation. In terms of individuals,

those who believed were not His chosen ones, but His choice ones appointed to His service. The concept of the elect is equally applicable to Old Testament and New Testament believers. The Septuagint translates בְּחֵירָה with the Greek ἐκλεκτός so there is no differentiation between the languages concerning the meaning of these two words; they are essentially synonyms. In Isaiah 65:9, 15, and 22 the Israelites are referred to as God's chosen ones. That's acceptable as long as we remember that the meaning is referring to relationship between God and Israel and it could just as easily have been translated preferred ones or choice ones.

Biblical prophecy made it abundantly clear that the Israelites would be gathered from all over the world back into the land when Messiah comes. The only reason to deny Israel's return to the land, and it is a totally invalid reason, is Replacement Theology.

Jeremiah 16:14–15 ¹⁴“Therefore behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ ¹⁵but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.’ For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.

Isaiah 11:11–12 ¹¹Then it will happen on that day that the Lord Will again recover the second time with His hand The remnant of His people, who will remain, From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, And from the islands of the sea. ¹²And He will lift up a standard for the nations And assemble the banished ones of Israel, And will gather the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth.

The church does not go through the Tribulation so it cannot be the subject of Matthew 24:31. Only premillennial dispensationalists can understand this because other theological systems put the church in the Old Testament, replace Israel with the church, deny a pretribulational rapture, put the church in the Tribulation—if they even believe in a Tribulation—and deny that Israel is going to be gathered back into the land.

Speaking through Jeremiah, God used the impending destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon to not only confirm that event but to confirm an eschatological restoration of Israel in the end times. This Scripture confirms a final regathering of Israel back into the land from all over the world when they are in a state of belief.

Jeremiah 23:1–8 ¹“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!” declares the LORD. ²Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: “You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds,” declares the LORD. ³“Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries [אֲרָצוֹת] where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. ⁴“I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer,

nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the LORD. ⁵“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶“In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, ‘The LORD our righteousness.’ ⁷“Therefore behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when they will no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ ⁸but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from the north land and from all the countries where I had driven them.’ Then they will live on their own soil.”

The first two verses are referring to the kings who ruled Judah immediately before the Babylonian destruction. The next verse jumps to the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. The Jews were not dispersed throughout the world at the time of Jeremiah; they were taken to Babylon, a single country. The restoration spoken of in verse 3 is out of the whole earth and not just a single nation. The Hebrew word translated “countries” or “nations” here is אֲרָצוֹת which has the primary meaning of the world or the earth; the surface of the earth where humankind dwells. It is the same word used in Genesis 1:1 to refer to the earth. It can refer to nations or countries but that isn't the primary meaning. Bringing the remnant back to the land refers to the remnant scattered throughout the earth; it can't refer to the return from Babylon. Not all the Jews returned from Babylon at that time; all living Jews will be repatriated at the end and this is the return Jeremiah is addressing. The Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled when the Branch from the root of Jesse assumes the Davidic throne. That is not something that happened when the Jews returned to Israel from Babylon. In the distant future, Israel's national salvation will occur and they will dwell safely in the land of Israel. Those things did not happen when they returned from Babylon. This worldwide restoration is going to overshadow in significance the exodus out of Egypt and that event will scarcely be brought to mind after this mighty work of God on behalf of Israel at the time of the end.

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