

The Second Half of the Tribulation

📖 Matthew 24:9–14

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The two questions the disciples ask in 24:3 relate to the time of the temple's destruction and the sign that the Messiah's return to bring the present age to an end and establish the kingdom. As for the first question, Matthew does not record Jesus' answer about the temple because he is concerned mainly with the establishment of the kingdom. Luke, however, does record the answer and he says when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies know that it's desolation is near. The prediction was fulfilled in AD70 when not one stone of the temple rested upon another but they were all cast down. As for the second question, Matthew does record Jesus' answer about the sign of Messiah's return and the establishment of the kingdom. My understanding of His answer is that He is revealing events that will occur immediately preceding the Messiah's return to establish the kingdom and not to a series of historical events that will occur during or at the end of the church age that will intensify as the present age comes to a close. In other words, the position I am presenting is a consistent futurism and not a blend of historicism and futurism as is commonly espoused by popular dispensationalists like Hal Lindsay and Tim LaHaye or academic dispensationalists like Arnold Fruchtenbaum and Stanley Toussaint. What this means is I don't think the appearances of false Christ's throughout the Church age or wars such as WWI and WWII are signs we are nearing the end of the age or the beginning of the birth pangs. The birth pangs are limited to events within the future seven-year tribulation such that 24:4-8 are descriptive of judgments in the first half of the tribulation which are paralleled by the seal judgments in Rev 6:1-17. Matt 24:5 describes many false Christ's and the white horse of Rev 6:1-2 symbolizes many false Christ's, one of whom will be the anti-Christ. Matt 24:6-7 describes national wars and confederate wars and the red horse of Rev 6:3-4 symbolizes warfare. Matt 24:7 mentions famines and the black horse of Rev 6:5-6 symbolizes famine. Matt 24:7 mentions earthquakes and the sixth seal of Rev 6:12-17 mentions a great earthquake. Jesus says in 24:6 "these things must take place," but these are not the sign that the end of the age has come. Instead, in 24:8 He says "these things are the beginning of birth pangs." So I take it that the birth pangs begin with the things described in Matt 24:4-8 and are parallel to the seal judgments in Rev 6. Therefore, they occur in the first half of the seven-year Tribulation. One argument against this view is that the fifth seal finds no parallel with Matt 24:4-8. The fifth seal is the martyrs under the altar. The answer of Thomas Ice is that v 9 is describing the sixth seal. He goes on to state that vv 9-14 all refer to the first half of the tribulation as well. The only way this is possible, in my thinking, is if vv 9-14 are describing the

trouble Jews are facing outside the land because the Jews inside the land will be living in peace and security under the anti-Christ. But the context is discussing Jews who live in the land, for example, v 15 the abomination of desolation will occur in Jerusalem, v 16 those who are in Judea is a clear reference to Jews in the land, in v 20 the reference to Sabbath is really an issue only in the land. Therefore, I think it's better to view vv 9-14 as referring to the second half of the tribulation. That would mean that the parallels are not perfect but that is accounted for by the fact that Jesus is giving a mini-apocalypse here and we wouldn't expect all the details to be recorded. None of the trumpets are recorded.

Nevertheless, the parallels with the six seals are too obvious to pass over. So I'm taking it that vv 4-8 deal with the first half and these are not the end but they are the beginning of birth pangs and vv 9-14 deal with the second half and these are a continuation of the birth pangs when Israel will face its most difficult time of distress right up until the end. V 14 says, "then the end will come." V 15 goes back and gives the sign that Jewish believers in the land should watch for because it will signal their time of distress and then the text runs continuous until v 29, the blackout and then v 30, the sign of the Son of Man will appear and the tribes of Israel will mourn when they see Him coming with great power and glory, then Jews outside the land will be regathered and the kingdom will be established.

Thus, 24:9-14 seems to describe events of the second half of the Tribulation when Israel will face its most difficult time of distress. This would be nothing new because Jer 30:7 described the second half as "the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be rescued from it." Dan 12:1 described it as "a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued." Rev 12:12 describes it saying, "When the dragon [Satan] saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman [Israel] who gave birth to the male child [Messiah]. But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman [Israel], so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent [Satan]." All three of those passages follow the same pattern, a great period of distress for Israel that ends with Israel being rescued. Our passage seems to follow the exact same pattern because there is trouble in verse 9 and note verse 13, "the one who endures to the end, he will be saved." So v 9 begins the second half and the key word that signals a shift to the second half is the very first word, **Then. Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.** The word **then** is *τοτε*. It has two possible translations. The first is "at that time" referring to simultaneity with events of the previous verses. This is preferred by Thomas Ice who sees these verses as part of the first half of the Tribulation. He says, "The word then in verse 9 means simultaneously as the events that occur in verses 4-8. Matthew places this persecution with the beginning of sorrows...The word does not mean after the beginning of sorrows, but at the same time or simultaneously with the beginning of sorrows. Thus, verse 9, cannot be projected into the second half of the Tribulation. There is no sequence here, for this persecution will take place during or at the same time, as the beginning of sorrows. And as we have seen, the beginning of sorrows refers to the early tribulation period, and corresponds to the events of

Revelation 6." The second possibility is to translate it "then, thereupon" referring to the next sequence of events. Ice does not mention this lexical possibility but it is well-attested in the NT. For example, even within this discourse in 24:14 and 16 the word "then" is used to convey a definite sequence. Verse 14, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and *then* the end will come." Clearly a sequence is in view. Pentecost said, "The word "then" in verse 9 seems to introduce the great persecutions against Israel that...will last for the last half of the tribulation period."¹ This seems confirmed by the fact that Jeremiah and Daniel already taught that the Jewish people would be persecuted during the second half of the Tribulation, not the first, and v 9 seems to be describing the beginning of this persecution.

Who are the **they** who will deliver the Jews to tribulation? **They** seems to be **all nations** who are said to hate them at the end of the verse. Govett says, "The persons addressed in this division, are, as I suppose, Jewish believers in Jesus: holding in spiritual things, the place which 'the twelve' of that day held."² The nations will hate the Jewish believers. The reason for this particular form of anti-Semitism is stated at the end of verse 9, **because of My name**. They hate the Jewish believers because they are associated with the name of Jesus. All nations on earth will hate the name of Jesus and the Jews associated with the name of Jesus they will also hate. The reason it is Jewish believers in the Messiahship of Jesus in particular and not simply all people on earth who believe in Jesus is because the second coming is contingent on Jewish believers calling on the Messiah to return. Matt 23:39, You [Israel] will not see me until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD." So if Satan can destroy every Jewish believer on the planet then Jesus will never come back. Therefore, the Second Coming is completely unrelated to anything a Gentile believer might do. It is totally dependent on Jewish believers issuing the Messianic Greeting.

So 24:9 seems to be describing the beginning of the world's persecution of Jewish believers and not simply a persecution of believers in general which is a very common view in the literature. For example, Wiersbe says, "Christians have always been hated by the world, but here we have an acceleration of persecutions and murders."³ This is simply not doing full justice to the text. The contrast between you and **the nations**, which can just as easily be translated "Gentiles" should make clear that this is global anti-Semitism. McGee is spot on when he says, "Obviously, He is not addressing the church but the nation Israel. The affliction He is talking about is anti-Semitism on a worldwide scale."⁴ Three things are stated that the world will do to Jewish believers at this time. First, **they will deliver you to tribulation**. This is a technical term for "turning a prisoner over to punishment." It means those among the nations will hand over Jewish believers to the governing authorities such as police or the military in much the same way that Judas betrayed and handed over Jesus to the governing authorities. The police or military will then subject them to all kinds of **tribulation** such as interrogation by torture in order to gather information about the whereabouts of other Jewish believers. Second, **and will kill you**. This means that when their Jewish captives are of no more use to their torturers they will murder them. Some might think of the horrors of the Holocaust but this will be much worse than the Holocaust. Jeremiah 30:7 describes the difficulty in this way, "Alas! For that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's

distress..." Dan 12:1 described it as "a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time." I think our passage describes it in 24:21, "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 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." Since there can only be one period of unparalleled difficulty then all these passages must be speaking of the same future period. Third, **and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.** An almost identical phrase is used in Matt 10:22 in the context of the future mission to the Jewish people which will be carried out by the 144,000 and the two witnesses, except without the word **nations** added to specify. The meaning of both passages is that there will not be one Jew-friendly nation on earth in the second half of the Tribulation. Every nation will have turned against Israel. However, this does not mean there will be no Jew-friendly individuals within the nations. Zech 14:16 says, "...it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King..." These are individual Gentiles who will enter the kingdom and go up to Jerusalem to worship the King. Matt 25:31-46 describes Jesus' judgment of all living Gentiles who survive the tribulation as being divided into sheep and goats based on their treatment of Jewish believers. Those who risk their lives to help them are Gentile believers who will be rewarded accordingly as they go into the kingdom. So certainly there will be individual Gentiles who will be Jew-friendly, but the point of this verse is that no Gentile nation on earth will be Jew-friendly. All the nations of the world will have the foreign policy of Germany in 1942, that is, it is illegal to be a Jewish believer in Jesus, all Jewish believers must be exterminated. The reason will be to exterminate the name of Jesus so no Jewish believer is left to request Jesus' return.

If 24:9 describes how the world will treat Jewish believers, then 24:10 describes how Jewish unbelievers will treat Jewish believers, in other words, division among the Jews. **At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.** Three things here. First, **many will fall away.** The verb **fall away** is *σκανδαλιζω*. In the passive voice it means "to be tripped up into sin." The anti-Christ and the false prophet will trip up Jewish unbelievers into following him and his false teaching. This is sin. Second, **many...will betray one another.** The verb **betray** is *παραδομι*, the same word used in verse 9 translated "deliver." It means "to betray" as Judas betrayed Jesus and handed him over to the authorities. Jewish unbelievers who are following the anti-Christ will betray Jewish believers by turning them over to the anti-Christ and his soldiers. A parallel passage that describes the betrayal among the Jews at this time is Matt 10:21 where Jesus said in a tribulation context, "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death." Again, this is not just betrayal among people in general. This is betrayal among the Jewish people. Third, **many...will hate one another.** There will be strong hatred on the part of Jewish unbelievers against Jewish believers during this time. The reason for such hatred is the previous verse. They will hate the name of Jesus and therefore they will hate Jews who believe in Jesus. The name of Jesus has always been a point of division among the Jewish people. At this time the division will be so intense that Jewish unbelievers will betray Jewish believers, turning them over to the anti-Christ to destroy them.

In 24:11 **Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.** There will arise many **false prophets.** These false prophets will be Jewish. Zech 13:2 says, "I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land." The reference is to false prophets among the Jewish people and not just false prophets or teachers in general during the Church age. Thomas Ice says, "False prophets are not the same as false teachers, as some suppose. The use of the term "false prophets" reinforces our understanding of the Jewish orientation of this passage." Bruce Ware notes the following: "False prophets were Israel's trouble; false teachers are the church's problem. Jesus' use of pseudoprophetses...in the Olivet Discourse calls for a Jewish understanding of the term unless some contrary internal contextual evidence can be advanced to show that the word has taken on some different and rare meaning. Since there is no such evidence contextually, it is best to understand the word to refer to false prophets in Judaism. Again this "Jewish element" in the discourse remains Jewish and does not relate to the church."⁵ Of course, among the **many false prophets** will come one **false prophet** par excellence described later in Rev 13:11-18. The false prophet will lead the world in worshipping the anti-Christ and his image that will be set up in the Tribulation temple. He will make people take the mark of the anti-Christ. And here our verse tells us he **will mislead many.** This is a summary of his misleading many Jews in worshipping the anti-Christ and taking his mark. In 24:4 Jesus warned His Jewish disciples "See to it that no one misleads you, for many will come in My name saying, "I am the Christ" and will mislead many." Here **many** Jews are being **mislead** because they do not believe Jesus is the Christ and so believe in anti-Christ.

In 24:12 **Because lawlessness is increased most people's love will grow cold.** The atmosphere in the second half of the tribulation will be one of **lawlessness.** One of the names of the anti-Christ in 2 Thess 2:3 and 8 is "the man of lawlessness." Dan 11:36 describes him as doing "as he pleases..." **Lawlessness** is a way of life that one does only as one pleases. The background of his lawlessness is also related to the Jews. Dan 7:25 describes his lawlessness when it says that he "will intend to make alterations in times and in law." The alterations in times and in law relate to alterations in Jewish feast days and laws. He will alter these times and laws in order to create his new religion with his religious calendar. Jeroboam did this same thing when he became king over the northern kingdom of Israel. He changed times and law. The bottom line is that **lawlessness** will increase because the man of lawlessness will alter Jewish times and law. Because of this Jesus says, **most people's love will grow cold.** This is most Jews. The original does not say **people,** it simply says, "the love of many will grow cold." While that may be true in a general way during this future time the context demands that we understand that the love of many Jews will grow cold. It corresponds to the verse 10 hate for one another. With their times and law changed Jewish unbelievers love for Jewish believers will grow cold and they will resort to turning them over to the anti-Christ's police.

24:13 shows how a Jewish believer may be delivered through this difficult time. Though this verse has been used to support the Perseverance of the Saints, the fifth point in the acrostic TULIP, it has no support in the context. Perseverance of the Saints historically in classic Calvinism meant that if a person is a genuine believer they will persevere in good works. This internally consistent system of theology led to the introspective Puritanism where

one was continually evaluating his good works to gain assurance he is really of the elect. Some distorted the historic understanding of the Perseverance of the Saints to merely refer to Eternal Security. Eternal Security is a biblical doctrine but the historic Perseverance of the Saints is a distortion of biblical teaching. In this end-times context it is certainly not supported. **the one who endures to the end that will be saved** is the one who **endures to the end** of the tribulation in loving others. The magnitude of the difficulty in that time will make it very difficult to continue loving others, especially since there will be widespread deception and betrayal. However, those who do **will be saved**. By **saved** it is not meant eternal salvation but physical rescue from the anti-Christ and his soldiers. Pentecost says, "In the context the salvation referred to here is from persecution, that is, salvation from the beast's control by the appearance of the Deliverer (Rom. 11:26)."⁶ In other words, the promise is of a physical deliverance by Messiah for Jewish believers who endure **to the end** in love.

In 24:14, **This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.** The **gospel of the kingdom** is quite literally "the good news of the kingdom." This is not simply the gospel. The gospel is Christ's death and resurrection. The good news of the kingdom was preached before Christ's death and resurrection in connection with the kingdom offer by John the Baptist, Jesus and the Twelve to Israel only. In Matt 3, 4 and 10 the message to Israel is the same, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When that generation of Israel rejected the message in Matt 12 they decided to destroy Christ. After Christ's death and resurrection a second offer of the kingdom was given to the nation Israel through the apostles. The gospel of the kingdom was preached in the Book of Acts with the necessity that Israel repent but with the additional message of Christ's death and resurrection. The gospel of the kingdom continued to be proclaimed throughout the Book of Acts but when the destruction of Jerusalem occurred in AD70 the simple gospel has been proclaimed. The offer of the kingdom was no longer on the table for Israel after AD70. However, according to this verse a third offer of the kingdom will once more be on the table. This time it will be during the future tribulation. At that time the kingdom will once again be near and people will still need to believe in the death and resurrection of Christ. Our verse tells us that it **shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations**. Surely the two witnesses and the 144,000 Jews will preach the gospel of the kingdom during the first half of the tribulation. However, they will not **preach it in the whole world**. Rev 14:6 tells us how it will be preached in the whole world during the second half of the tribulation as described here. "And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;⁷ and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters." Thus, an angel will complete the mission of the two witnesses and the 144,000, to take the gospel of the eternal kingdom to everyone on the face of the planet. I personally believe more people will believe during this time than during the entire Church age.

There are two false teachings related to the preaching of the gospel and the Church age. The first is that the rapture cannot come until the gospel is preached to everyone on the planet. While it is a noble goal to preach

the gospel to everyone on the planet it simply is not true that the rapture cannot come until the Church preaches the gospel to every person. The truth is that the kingdom cannot come until the gospel is preached to everyone on the planet. An angel will accomplish this. The second is that if someone rejects the gospel during the church age then they will not be able to believe it after the rapture. This is simply not true. The truth is that anyone who takes the mark of the beast during the Tribulation will not be able to believe because they will have believed what is false (2 Thess 2:11; Rev 14:9-11). The tribulation is a unique time, the gospel of the kingdom's nearness including the message of the death and resurrection of Christ will be preached to every person on the planet and everyone will either believe in Christ or anti-Christ. This will set those who do not believe for judgment and elimination from the planet.

Then, as Jesus says at the end of 24:14, **the end will come**. In 24:3 the disciples had asked "what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age" and so by verses 13 and 14 Jesus has taken us all the way up to **the end** of the age but He has not given us the sign of the end of the age. We will work with these signs next week.

For now, what I want to emphasize in 24:9-14 is that these descriptions are very Jewish oriented and not general pictures of hatred of Christians. Therefore, they refer to Israel under persecution during the second half of the tribulation. In 24:9 the "Then" is sequential indicating what will happen next after the events of 24:4-8 in the first half of the tribulation. They will be betrayed over to police and military for torture and interrogation, they will be massacred, they will be hated by every Gentile nation on earth, though there will be Gentiles who bless Israel and become the sheep in the sheep/goats judgment and enter the kingdom. The reason they are so hated by the nations is because of their identification with Jesus' name. In 24:10, many Jews will be tripped up by the false prophet to follow the anti-Christ, they will betray Jewish believers and hate will thrive among themselves. In 24:11 many false prophets will arise in Israel and will mislead many Jews into following anti-Christ. In 24:12 lawlessness will increase under the rule of the anti-Christ who is known as the man of lawlessness. He will alter Jewish feast times and law. The result is most Jewish people's love will grow cold. But in 24:13 the Jewish believers who endure in love until the end of the tribulation will be physically delivered by Jesus when He returns. In 24:14 the gospel of the kingdom's nearness, including the message of Christ's death and resurrection shall be preached to all the nations on earth. This will occur by normal every day witnessing, by the two witnesses, by the 144,000 and especially by an angel who will preach it from the sky. Then the end will come. Jesus takes us right up to the end in vv 13 and 14 but He still has not told us the sign of the end. Verse 15 backs up and tells us the sign that the Jews are about to enter their time of great tribulation and verse 30 tells us the sign of the Son of Man immediately after their tribulation.

Questions...I left some time for discussion on purpose...

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p 279.

² <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-9>

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 87.

⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 132.

⁵ <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-10>

⁶ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 400.