

The Parable of the Fig Tree

📖 Matthew 24:32-41

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We are studying Matthew 24-25, Jesus' most extensive discussion on future events and His last discourse to the nation Israel. In particular, last time we studied the Second Coming and the sign of the Second Coming for those who live on earth at that time. This is described in 24:23-31 and provides the answer the disciples were looking for in 24:3, "...what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" Carefully, Jesus says in 24:23-28 that His coming will not be so obscure that people will have to be told where He is. Even if people claim that He is in a hidden location somewhere, and do great signs and wonders to accompany the message, believing Jews should not believe them and come out of hiding. Instead, in 24:27, the coming of the Son of Man will be just like lightning flashing from one side of the sky to the other. It will be sudden and it will be unpredictable. When He comes 24:28 describes the mass carnage that will result for those not prepared with salvation. In other words, there will be a judgment when He returns. The fact there is a judgment means there will still be unbelievers on the earth and they will have to be separated from the believers. These judgments will occur in the 75-day time-frame predicted in Dan 12:12. The judgments themselves are described in Matt 25 as a judgment upon Jews and then a judgment upon Gentiles. After the judgments, the only people left on earth will be believing Jews and Gentiles and they will go into the kingdom to re-populate the millennial earth.

Since His coming will occur so quickly and unpredictably, catching everybody off guard, what will be the sign of His coming? 24:29 teaches that the stage for the sign will be set by a cosmic blackout. The sun will be dark; the moon will not give light. With that background 24:30 describes the sign of the Son of Man appearing in the sky. Scholars debate what exactly the sign is; is it a cross in the sky, is it the Son of Man himself or is it the bright light of Shechinah Glory? A cross in the sky sounds interesting but has no textual support, so that's out. The Son of Man can't be the sign of the Son of Man because for a sign to be a sign of a thing it has to be distinct from the thing it is a sign of. The Shechinah Glory seems to be the sign. Shechinah Glory is a visible manifestation of God usually appearing as a cloud and light. When Jesus ascended in Acts 1 the angels said that He would come again in the same way He departed. Since He ascended by going up and being enveloped in a cloud then He will come again enveloped in a cloud and light. So with a pitch black background the bright light of Shechinah will light up the entire sky signaling the coming of the Son of Man. "Then all the tribes of the earth" or "land" will mourn. Let's

take a few moments to look into this a little further so you can see why I was torn about how to interpret “all the tribes of the earth.” It might sound straightforward enough but the word translated earth is $\gamma\eta$ and can also mean “land.” So the twelve tribes of the land could be in view. Turn to Zech 12:8. In 12:8 you see this is a localized text dealing with Jerusalem and its inhabitants. “In that day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem,” what day? The day verse 3 describes as all the nations of the earth gathered against it.” So during the campaign of Armageddon. And notice that in verse 8 the Lord is going to set out to defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, “and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David *will be* like God, like the angel of the Lord before them.” So the Lord is going to supernaturally energize them to fight against their enemies. This is just like the days of Joshua. Verse 9, “And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. ¹⁰“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;” This Lord is going to pour out His Spirit on them and they are going to look on Him whom they pierced. The point there is not that they are seeing Him in the sky returning at this point as some have argued. Instead, in the Hebrew they are looking upon Him mentally with a realization of who He is and what they did to Him. This is a result of Him pouring out the Spirit of grace and supplication. And so, as a consequence of realizing who He is and what they have done to Him “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. ¹¹“In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. ¹²“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; ¹³the 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; ¹⁴all the families that remain, every family by itself and their wives by themselves.” So obviously these Jews are mourning in repentance, there’s no question about that. And I think they are asking Him to come back. And that is what Matt 23:39 says, You will not see Me until you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” So they have had the Spirit poured out on them, they have realized who He is and what they have done to Him, they are mourning and asking Him to come back and then He will return and fight for them as He does on a day of battle. So I think that the one’s mourning in Matt 24:30 are the believing remnant of Israel asking Him to come back.

Now turn to Rev 1:7. Here we have a phrase almost identical to Matt 24:30. “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.” This passage is riddled with the same difficulties as Matt 24:30. I’m not sure it helps too much because all three groups here could be the same group if John is using the ascensive use of $\kappa\alpha\iota$, which is very common in the Book of Revelation. In other words, the “Every eye” that “will see Him” is the same as “those who pierced Him” is the same as “all the tribes of the land.” The ascensive use of $\kappa\alpha\iota$ would equate the groups, it would not distinguish the groups, and in this case they would all be the Jewish remnant. Every eye of the Jewish remnant seeing Him return to the land of Israel in the midst of their realizing that they had pierced Him and all

the tribes of the land being the Jewish remnant of all twelve tribes. A strength of this view is the fact that throughout the Book of Revelation another phrase is used to refer to all people on earth and that is the phrase, "Every tribe, tongue, people and nation." So it still seems best to me to view the phrase "tribes of the earth" as better translated "tribes of the land" and a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel and I think it is the believing remnant in the land mourning in repentance calling Him to return and at this time He does return. That's almost what the whole book of Revelation is about.

Finishing verse 30, the "Son of Man" will then come in the same way that He departed as described in Acts 1:9-11, on the clouds of the sky. The title "Son of Man" comes from Dan 7:13 and refers to the one like a Son of Man coming up to the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom. Undoubtedly, Jesus is coming to establish the kingdom at this time. His coming to do so will be "with power and great glory." No opposition will thwart Him.

In 24:31 one of the first things He will do is described, **And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds from one end of the sky to the other.** This verse along with verse 30 are commonly used by historic premillennialists to support a post-tribulation rapture. Historic premillennialists are those who see no distinction between Israel and the Church and consider the Church as the true or spiritual Israel, also known as the company of the redeemed, the one people of God or the elect. Their chief proof text is Gal 6:16, even though it has been shown that the verse is not identifying the Church as the Israel of God but singling out the Israel of God as the Jewish remnant within the Church. Another supposed proof text is Rom 2:28-29 but the distinction here is between the Jewish remnant within the Church and the non-remnant. Romans 9:6 is teaching the same distinction between remnant and non-remnant within the nation Israel. The fact is, the term Israel is used 73 times in the NT and it never once refers to the Church. It always refers either to the nation descended from Jacob as a whole or to the Jewish remnant as a subset of the nation. Failure to distinguish between Israel and the Church is the number one issue lurking behind post-tribulationism. Post-tribulationism is the teaching that the rapture will occur after the tribulation. When Christ is returning on the clouds of heaven at the second advent the true Church will be caught up to Him in the air and then return immediately with Him to earth. This is to remove them from His wrath which they confine to that day.

The essential arguments they make that the Second Coming and the Rapture are the same is that these passages are all similar. For example, Matt 24:30 mentions a cloud and 1 Thess 4:17 mentions a cloud. Matt 24:30 mentions the Lord coming and 1 Thess 4:16 mentions the Lord descending. Matt 24:31 mentions a trumpet and 1 Thess 4:16 mentions a trumpet. In addition, 1 Cor 15:52 mentions a trumpet. Matt 24:31 mentions a gathering and 1 Thess 4:17 mentions being caught up together with the Lord. Because of these similarities Matt 24:30-31 are said to be parallel to 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:50-57 and all descriptive of the post-tribulation rapture. However, this argument fails on several points.

Second, to argue that similarity in these passages equals identity is committing a logical fallacy. In other words, it assumes that because two things are similar they must be identical. Take two airplanes; a C-130 transport and an F-16 fighter jet. They both have wings, engines, seating, landing gear and instrumentation. But does that mean that a C-130 transport is the same as an F-16 fighter jet? Of course not. In the same way, just because there are similarities between Matt 24:30-31, 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:50-57 it does not mean they are speaking of identical events. In fact, when one compares the passages there are many more differences. In Matt 24:30 the Second Coming is preceded by a sign. But in 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:50-57 the Rapture is sign-less. In Matt 24:30 the Second Coming is associated with mourning. But in 1 Thess 4:13-18 the Rapture is associated with comfort. In Matt 24:30-31 there is no resurrection. But in 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:50-57 there is a resurrection. In Matt 24:30-31 the elect are gathered by angels. But in 1 Thess 4:13-18 believers are gathered by Christ Himself. In Matt 24:30-31 the Son of Man comes to earth. But in 1 Thess 4:13-18 the Lord only comes in the air. These differences outweigh the similarities. It seems better to understand that the context of Matt 24:30-31 Israel and the Second Coming are in view and in 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:50-57 the Church and the Rapture are in view. Finally, several OT passages predict that God will regather Israel in the end time and some even connect it with a trumpet blast. Deut 30:4, "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." Ps 106:47, "Save us, O Lord our God, And gather us from among the nations, To give thanks to Your holy name And glory in Your praise." Jer 16:14-15, "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." And finally, Isa 27:12-13 connects most closely with Matt 24:31, connecting not only the gathering, but also the gathering in connection with "a great trumpet." "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.¹³It 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." In the end, all these passages are talking about the second and final regathering of Israel in belief. They are currently regathering to the land in unbelief but at the mid-point the anti-Christ will commit the abomination of desolation and they will have to flee the land. When they call upon Him to return He will come as Matt 24:30 describes. Then Jesus will send forth His angels in connection with a great trumpet to gather all the believing Jews from the four points of the compass, from all over the earth. They will be given special transport, not by El Al but by angels. This is distinct from the trumpet blown to signal the rapture of the Church. Trumpets signal many things in Scripture. They are not all the same.

When we come to Matt 24:32 and the parable of the fig tree we have an excursus. What Jesus is doing here is giving some exhortation and application in light of the events in 24:4-26 which immediately precede His coming in 24:27-31. Pentecost said, "Before resuming the chronology of prophetic events (Matt. 25:1), the Lord paused

to give certain parenthetical exhortations concerning watchfulness and preparedness (24:32-51). He applied His teaching to those who will witness the great events of which He had previously spoken.”¹ In other words, the parenthetical exhortations only apply to the generation that sees these things. This is another reason the events in 24:4-14 do not occur during any part of the church age. Numerous dispensational interpreters interpret 24:4-8 as referring to events that occur down through the corridors of the church age and some interpret 24:9-14 as general signs that occur during the church age and intensify near the end. However, if either of these approaches is correct then the Church would be included among those who should be watching and prepared for the second coming of Christ. However, Jesus is not discussing the Church but the nation Israel. The issue is 24:3 “what is the sign of your coming and the end of the age.” In Jewish thinking this question is about the events immediately preceding the establishment of the kingdom, not events that will occur during the Church age. The disciples had only heard the church mentioned on two occasions, Matt 16:18, a prediction of the universal church and Matt 18:15, a description of procedures in the local church. Since the word church was a non-technical term simply referring to a gathering the disciples had no concept of the Church as the body of Christ that would be established on Pentecost and defined later as believing Jews and Gentiles in one new man, an entirely new entity crucified, raised and seated in Him in the heavenly places soon to be gathered to Him, rewarded and return as the spiritual nucleus of the kingdom. To bring the Church into the Olivet Discourse is one of the greatest confusions and hoaxes ever pawned on the Christian Church. The issue is the kingdom and its establishment at Christ’s coming. Verse 32 is saying the generation that sees these things should **learn the parable from the fig tree.**

The word **parable** is *παραβολη* and breaks down into two words, *παρα* a preposition that means “alongside” and *βολη* “to cast or throw,” and so to cast or throw alongside. A parable is a truth that is cast or thrown alongside something well-known and true from life, though not necessarily a true story. Thus, the parable moves from something known to the audience in everyday life to something unknown. The Jews were very familiar with the growth-cycle of the **fig tree**. When the **fig tree** began to sprout new tender leaves it signaled that summer was near. The teaching is clear. When a generation of Israel begins to see the signs explained they should know that Jesus’ coming is near. Constable said, “As the appearance of tender twigs and leaves on a fig tree indicate the nearness of summer, so the appearance of the signs Jesus explained would indicate that His coming is near.”¹

Despite this plain teaching the fig tree has been terribly distorted by many well-meaning dispensationalists. The claim is that the fig tree represents modern day Israel established as a state on May 14, 1948. So we are to know that from the establishment of the State of Israel that Jesus’ coming is near. This led to speculative date-setting. One early claim was that since a generation is 40 years then simply add 40 years to May 14, 1948 as the date for the Second Coming. The rapture was dated seven years before in 1981. When these predictions failed, new corrected calculations arose arguing that a generation was 70-80 years moving His second coming to between

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 24:32.

2018 and 2028 and the rapture no later than 2021. Other predicted dates for the Second Coming or rapture have been predicted in 1988, 1994, 1999, 2000, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and so forth and so on. Many of the dates set were by Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. When dispensationalists began to set dates it led to a popular, sensational form of dispensationalism which exegetes Scripture by daily newspaper headlines. Every major world event is assigned as the fulfillment of some prophecy ushering in the end times. This mistreatment of the text has cast a shadow over dispensational theology as a whole and led to it being considered a cult by many.

Those who made the claim that the fig tree represented the modern State of Israel argued that Israel is represented by the "fig tree" in Jer 24:1-8, which views good figs as good captives and bad figs as bad captives, and Jer 29:17, which likens Israel to rotten figs. However, in neither is the nation Israel likened to a "fig tree" but rather to good or bad figs. As with all parables, when an object is chosen to make a comparison, the characteristic of that object that is in view in the context controls the interpretation. In this parable, the characteristic of the fig tree that Jesus chose is the time of its sprouting new tender leaves as signaling the nearness of summer. In the same way, the time of the Tribulation signals the nearness of Christ's Second Coming. There really is nothing more to it than that. As Jesus Himself says in 24:33, **so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. When you see all of what things?** The things in Matt 24:4-26 that take place in the Tribulation. Toussaint says, "The lesson of the parable is rather simple: when the signs of the end appear the coming of the Son of Man is very near."² This sets the context for understanding Matthew 24:34.

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Unfortunately, there are five interpretations of **this generation** that draw attention away from the simple meaning of the parable. Nevertheless, they must be looked at so that we can defend the true meaning. First, **this generation** refers to Jesus' contemporary generation in the 1st century AD. This is the view of liberals who sought to find errors in Jesus' teaching. They frankly state that Jesus made an error here because none of these things happened in the 1st century AD. I agree that none of these things happened in the 1st century but disagree that is what Jesus meant by **this generation**. M'Neile, representative of this view says, "It is impossible to escape the conclusion that Jesus, as Man, expected the End within the lifetime of His contemporaries..."³ His strong assertion centers on Jesus being simply human and therefore capable of erring. However, Scripture teaches that while Jesus was true humanity He was also undiminished deity in hypostasis. As such He cannot err in His humanity though He can admit ignorance arising from His humanity as He does a few verses later in verse 36 where He says, "Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." Second, Preterists borrowed this view from the Liberals and so agree that **this generation** must refer to Jesus' contemporary generation in the 1st century AD. However, rather than saying Jesus made an error they interpret this to mean that all the things in Matthew 24, including the abomination of desolation and the second coming of Christ, occurred in and around the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. To sustain this interpretation of the events requires them to take great liberties with the text, such as claiming the second coming of Christ took

place in and through the Roman armies, or avoiding some of the predictions altogether, such as the presence of false Christs of which there is no single shred of evidence at the time. Nevertheless, this interpretation has spread into evangelicalism and is held by popular radio personality R. C. Sproul among others. Third, **this generation** refers to the race of Jewish people. The word translated **generation** is γενεα and can refer to a "race" or "kind." The interpretation would be that the race of Jewish people would not pass away, that is, be exterminated, before all these things take place. Grammatically this is a possible interpretation but probably not the best. Fourth, **this generation** could simply refer to the generation of Jews that see all these things. Since that is the context from v 32 and 33 this is the best interpretation. The meaning is that the generation that sees all these things will not pass away before they have all run their course and the Son of Man has come. Pentecost agrees saying, "Since these signs will all occur in the seven years of Daniel's seventieth week, the generation that sees the beginning of these signs will "not pass away until all these things have happened" (Matt 24:34), for they all will fall within a brief span of time."⁴ His reasoning is correct. The generation that sees will not pass from the scene because all these things will happen in a very short time period. This fits well with the parable of the fig tree. When the fig tree begins to put forth new tender shoots it's a very short time till summer. So the generation that sees the Tribulation will not pass away until the Son of Man comes.

In 24:35 Jesus establishes the certainty of His words saying, **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.** Put shortly, Jesus' words are more stable than the entire **heaven and earth.** **Heaven and earth** is scheduled for destruction but the word of God will never be destroyed. This reminds us of the famous passage in Isa 40:8, "The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever." The point of this saying is that His words are absolutely certain.

In 24:36, while His words in the prophecy are absolute the exact timing of His coming is not absolutely known, only an approximation of its timing can be ascertained by those living in that time. **But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.** The expression **day and hour** are designed to convey exact timing. **No one** except **the Father alone** has this information. The reason is because the Father has not revealed it. Jesus taught essentially the same thing in Acts 1:7 when the apostles asked, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" and "He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;" There are some things that remain a mystery, hidden only in the mind of God. The exact timing of the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom is one such mystery. It is known and fixed by the Father but it has not been revealed. **Not even the angels** who dwell in **heaven** have ever been told this information. And more than that, not **even the Son.** The mention of **the Son** has vexed many. However, the relationship in this verse is between that of the Father and **the Son** in His true humanity generated in the incarnation. In the incarnation Jesus took to Himself true humanity and its limitations. Luke 2:52 tells us that He had to grow in wisdom and in learning. Jesus is clearly speaking of knowledge given to Him during His incarnational state. The Father revealed to Him many truths in His incarnational state but one thing He did not reveal to Him was the exact timing of His coming to establish the

kingdom. Thomas Ice says, "I agree with most commentators that this passage is saying that in His incarnation as the Son of Man it was not given to Him (or revealed to Him) the time of His return." Of course, in His undiminished deity He knows the exact moment but in the incarnation He submitted the independent use of His divine attributes to the Father. Since the exact moment of His return has never been revealed no one should ever claim that they know the date of the Second Coming and to do so is presumptuous.

Some may wonder why that day and hour cannot be known since the Tribulation period is revealed in Daniel and Revelation to be a period of exactly 7 years of 360 days each which is 2,520 days. If someone living in that time knows the day and hour the anti-Christ makes the treaty with Israel then won't they be able to calculate the exact day and hour of the Second Coming? Of course. However, it is unlikely for several reasons. First, they would have to know the exact day and hour the anti-Christ signs the treaty with Israel or the exact moment of the abomination of desolation. Since treaties are signed behind closed doors it would be unlikely that anyone would know the exact moment the signatures were made on the treaty. If one did not know that exact time he might have another opportunity to gather the time by observing the day and hour of the abomination of desolation since it occurs at the mid-point. However, this too may be difficult to acquire since one would have to be in the temple to do so. Second, one would have to be able to keep careful record of days, weeks, months and years. This will be no small task since the Tribulation is characterized by wars, famines, earthquakes, signs in the heavens above, cosmic blackouts and more that can easily cause one to lose track of time. History recounts that it is not uncommon for people to lose track of time during wars, famines and difficult times. Therefore, for someone to calculate the time in the future will require special knowledge of the signing of the peace treaty or the abomination of desolation and the careful observation of days, weeks and years. Such precise knowledge is highly improbable. Verse 42 confirms saying, "be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." It is probably safe to say that a believer will be able to know generally when He is coming but no one will know exactly.

In 24:37-41 Jesus gives an illustration of His coming by comparing it to the coming of the flood in the days of Noah. Verse 37, **For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.** The expression **just like** is emphatic, occurring as the first word in the verse. The word is *ωσπερ*, it is a comparative adverb. When combined with the adverb *ουτως* it means "in exactly the same way." Jesus' point is that **the coming of the Son of Man will be exactly like** the coming of the flood in **the days of Noah.** Several passages compare the Second Coming to the Flood. They all emphasize the exact same point.

So in what way or ways will it be exactly the same? Just like in a parable there is only one major point and all other elements reinforce that point so there is only one major similarity and all the other elements reinforce that similarity. What is the similarity? Just as in the days of Noah, unbelievers should have known the flood was coming but were caught unaware and swept away in judgment so in the day of the Second Coming unbelievers should know He is coming but will be caught unaware and swept away in judgment. All the other elements such

as eating and drinking reinforce this basic idea of not paying attention to the signs of the times and being caught unaware by an event that has dire consequences. Of course, Jesus' disciples that live in that time should learn the parable of the fig tree and once they see these signs appear know that His coming is near and be prepared.

Verses 38-39 are given as an example to reinforce this basic similarity. **For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.** Two illustrations from daily life are used to show that people in the world before the Flood should have known the flood was coming but were caught unaware and swept away in judgment. Walvoord said, "While those observing Noah building the ark could anticipate that a flood was impending, it was obvious that the flood could not come until the ark was completed." In other words, the very building of the ark 500ft long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet tall on your front lawn should have been a sign that a flood was coming. But what did they do? They went about the normal pursuits of daily life; **eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.** Extraordinary times demand that we break from the normal pursuits of life and **the days before the flood** were extraordinary times and people who should have known the flood was coming did not care, went about their daily pursuits even **until the day that Noah entered the ark.** Walvoord observed, "When the ark was completed and Noah and his family and the animals were in it, those observing could anticipate that the predicted flood could occur any day." Yet did they break from their daily pursuits? No, **and** the text says **they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away.** It's not that they didn't hear. Peter tells us Noah was a preacher of righteousness. They heard the warning. They saw the ark being built. But the text says **they did not understand.** The word *γινωσκω* in this connection doesn't mean they didn't have cognitive knowledge, of course they knew cognitively a flood was coming, but it means they did not have relational knowledge. In other words, they did not have a close, personal knowledge of these things until it got up close and personal, but then it was too late. Of course, this up close and personal knowledge is readily available. Noah had it and dispensed it. And through faith he had an up close and personal knowledge of the flood before it ever came. Faith is the means of acquiring up front and personal knowledge of something prior to its actual arrival. Noah was able to do that as demonstrated by his construction of the ark. We are also to live by faith so that we are able to grasp the future reality of the rapture before it ever arrives and that is how the future disciples are to live in the coming tribulation so that they grasp the reality of the coming of the Son of Man before it arrives because as it was in the days of Noah, **so will the coming of the Son of Man be.** People will simply continue their daily pursuits without giving attention to all the signs around them and as a consequence they will be caught unaware and taken away in judgment.

Verses 40-41 illustrate the judgment when the Son of Man comes. **Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.** Clearly a separation of believers from unbelievers is in view. To me this is quite clearly the judgment at

the Second Coming though there are those who say this is the rapture. One slight problem is that the Church is not anywhere in the Olivet Discourse. The Church has barely been mentioned. The issue is the sign of the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom. So just because some verses sound similar to rapture passages or even use the same words does not mean they are identical. Similarity does not mean identity and really there are far more differences here than similarities. The only similarity I can find is the word *παραλαμβάνω* is used here for "taken" and it's also used in John 14:3, "I will come again and receive you to Myself." But just because the same word is used in a different context does not mean they refer to the same event. Besides that point of similarity the differences abound. There's no mention of a change in body. There's no mention of going to the Father's house. There's no mention of comfort and on and on and on. And really, to bring the Church into the Olivet Discourse at this point would have nothing to do with the context, which is being cognizant of the signs of the Tribulation so that they are ready for His Second Coming. And if this is the rapture, then you are putting it in a context where signs definitely precede the rapture. The fig tree corresponds to signs. The rapture is sign-less. So it is really bad to bring the rapture of the Church in here.

Who then are those **taken** and **left**? Given that in the previous analogy with the flood those taken were taken in the judgment of the flood and Noah and his family were left on earth to re-populate the new world it follows that those taken are unbelievers and those left are believers. Therefore, those **taken** are taken in judgment. Verse 28 said, "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." The corpses are of those who are taken in judgment. Those **left** are left alive to enter the kingdom. In 25:21 Jesus says "enter into the joy of your master." That means enter into the kingdom. The one's left are left to enter the kingdom. Therefore, if this is supposedly the rapture isn't it strange that the description is the opposite of the rapture. In the rapture believers are taken away from the world but here believers are left in the world to enter the kingdom. Walvoord said, "The one who is left, is left to enter the kingdom; the one who is taken, is taken in judgment. This is in keeping with the illustration of the time of Noah when the ones taken away are the unbelievers."⁵

In a way I want to keep going but we're out of time and there is so much here. In summary, the parable of the fig tree is an excursus on the importance of believers in that time recognizing the signs that mean the Second Coming is near and responding by living a faithful life because kingdom responsibilities will be issued at His return. In 24:32, the teaching is parabolic, it comes from everyday life and points to a truth by comparison. When the branch of the fig tree becomes tender and puts forth leaves summer is near. 24:33, so when you see all the signs described earlier know that His Coming is near. In 24:34 the generation that sees all these signs will not pass away until they have all taken place because they occur in a very short span of time. In 24:35 these things are certain because Jesus' words are more certain than the continuation of the present universe. In 24:36 what is not certain for us is the exact time of His coming because this has not been revealed, not even to angels or the Son of Man in His incarnational humanity, but it is known to the Father alone. The explanation of His coming in 24:37 likens it identically in one respect to the days of Noah. As far as unbelievers are concerned they continued pursuing daily routines even while living in the face of extraordinary times all the way up till the very day that

Noah entered the ark, a sure sign that time was up, and they did not have an up close and personal relationship with the coming flood until it came and then it was too late, it took them all away. When the Son of Man comes it will be exactly the same. In 24:40, there will be two men in one field; one will be taken in judgment and one will be left alive to enter the kingdom. 24:41, two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken in judgment and one will be left alive to enter the kingdom.

What's the application? Well, obviously one principle is being prepared with salvation. People who are lost don't have a close, personal association with the things of God. So if you see an unbeliever with even a spark of interest in the things of God I think you are seeing the Spirit of God at work on that person. You might think about spending some time with that person. Second, and more to the point of the passage, believers who live in that time will want to be living faithful lives so that when He comes He will assign them positions of honor in the kingdom.

The application is clear in 24:42-45, because no believer in that time will **know** the exact time the **Lord is coming** Jesus says, **Be on the alert.**

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 405.

² Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 278.

³ M'Neile, *St. Matthew*, 355.

⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 405.

⁵ John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 193.