

AN INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 24—25

Part X

by Thomas Ice

“And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.” —Matthew 24:10–13

Jesus is progressing through His description of the first half of the tribulation, building toward the middle of the seven-year period of verse 15. In this section our Lord describes the spiritual state of the Jews within the land of Israel (Matt. 24:10–13). Their spirituality is not good, from God’s perspective.

THE HATRED OF JEWISH BELIEVERS

In verse 9 Jesus predicts that all the nations of the world will hate the Jewish believers living in Israel during the tribulation. Why? Because they hate Jesus, the Messiah! This section of Christ’s discourse (verse 9–13) is parallel to Revelation 6:9–11 and the fifth seal judgment. Thus, many who professed faith in Jesus as the Messiah in easier times, will deny Him and cooperate in exposing those who are true believers in Jesus. Such an understanding of this passage coordinates well with the sheep and goats judgment of Matthew 25:31–46. “Brothers” in Matthew 25 are the persecuted Jewish believers during the tribulation that are being spoken of here in Matthew 24. Only genuine Gentile believers will be willing to risk their lives in order to help the Jewish remnant. While this speaks of persecution of believers, especially Jewish believers, during the first half of the tribulation, the entire seven-year tribulation will be a time of great persecution.

The external hatred from the world (verse 9) puts all who profess the name of Christ under pressure. This in turn produces internal hatred among the professing Christian community during the tribulation. “And at that time” locates the events of verses 10–13 to be the time of tribulation mentioned in verse 9. It is clear that all these things will take place during the same time period. When the pressure comes, those who are not genuine believers will do three things at this time: 1) fall away, 2) deliver up one another, and 3) hate one another.

Fall Away

The verb “fall away” carries the idea of “to cause to sin,” and in the passive use, as we have in this instance, it means to “let oneself be led into sin,” thus “fall away” from the truth.¹ This word is the verbal form of the noun “stumbling block” that is used often in Matthew (5:29f; 6:3; 11:6; 13:21, 57; 15:12; 17:27; 18:6, 8f; 26:13,33), although that is not the nuance here. Thomas Figart says that this word “refers to a stick-trap used to catch animals. Such entrapped persons could hardly be classed as true believers; rather, they are exactly like the seed which fell on stony ground in 13:21: . . . This leads to betrayal of one another, which is engendered by hatred.”² Matthew 10:16–23 is a parallel passage, which also speaks of the persecution described in this passage in greater detail. All of these things will take place during the tribulation.

Deliver Up One Another

Look at Matthew 10:21–22: “And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.” This is exactly the same thing that is going on here in Matthew 24. Because of the global reach of the antichrist and his regime during the tribulation, the pressure will be so great that even fellow family members will turn against one another

rather than face the consequences of not following the instructions of the global leader. “The greatest expression of apostasy was betraying others who intended to remain faithful,”³ notes Craig Keener.

Hate One Another

The hatred by all the nations (verse 9) against believers, especially Jewish believers (the remnant) in this context, will create such external pressure that it will result in hatred within the believing community among themselves. That is, false professors will turn against and hate the true believers. “The repeated reciprocal ‘one another,’ thus refers to betrayal (‘they will betray’; cf. v 9) and hostility (‘they will hate’; cf. v 9) within the ranks of the followers of Jesus.”⁴ There will be virtually nowhere to turn for the remnant of Jewish believers. The only place where they will be able to turn for any kind of help will be Gentile believers. This explains the rationale of Matthew 25:31–46 and why there will be the judgment of the Gentiles at the second coming for how they treated the Jewish believers during the tribulation.

PAST OR FUTURE?

Although weaker on this verse than others, it is not surprising to find that preterists believe that verse 10 has already occurred in the past.⁵ “The pagan Roman historian Tacitus speaks of Christians in the era of Nero as universally ‘hated for their crimes,’”⁶ declares Kenneth Gentry. He continues, “In verses 10 and 12 we discover a consequence of the persecution.”⁷ Yet, Tacitus describes what is going on in Rome, not Jerusalem, as does Matthew 24. How does this quote in any way relate to Matthew 24:10? In fact, Tacitus says in the same section that “there arose a feeling of compassion,”⁸ for the persecuted Christians in Rome. This hardly fits the context of Matthew 24:10.

Further, it has been noted above that verse 9 is linked to verse 10. Verse 9 says, “Then they will deliver **you** to tribulation, and will kill **you**, and **you** will be hated by all nations on account of My name.” Those whom Jesus calls “you” in verse 9, are referred to as the “many” and “one another” (2x) in verse 10. Since our Lord speaks of the same group of people (the saved remnant) in both verses, whatever happens to them in verse 10 must be the same people referenced by the plural you in verse 9. If, as preterists believe, that verses 9 and 10 happened to the disciples to whom Jesus was specifically addressing in the passage, instead of a still future group of Jewish believers in Jerusalem, then those events did not happen in the first century. When did *many* of the apostles fall away?⁹ When did *many* of the apostles betray one another? When did *many* of the apostles hate one another? Instead, they loved one another.

This verse, like all of them in Matthew 24:4–14, does not reference a past event. Instead, they look forward to a future time and a global event that will take place in literal Jerusalem.

MANY FALSE PROPHETS

In conjunction with the events of the preceding verses, “many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many.” This did not occur in the first century, to the extent that fulfilled the language of this passage, as taught by preterists like Gentry and DeMar.¹⁰ 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:

Here [2 Pet. 2:1] false prophets are distinguished from pseudodidaskalos, “false teachers.” The implication is clear: False prophets were Israel’s trouble; false teachers are the church’s problem. Jesus’ use of pseudoprophetes, then, 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.¹¹

Arno Gaebelein echoes Ware’s understanding of this passage when he tells us:

The Jewish age has false prophets; the Christian age has *false teachers*. “But there were false prophets also among the people, as there shall be also among you false teachers, who shall bring in by the bye destructive heresies, etc.” (2 Pet. ii:1). These false prophets who come in the end of the Jewish age will be possessed by evil spirits. Such was the case during the great apostasy of Israel under the reign of Ahab. The Lord permitted then a lying spirit to take possession of the false prophets as revealed by the prophet Messiah (2 Chronicles xviii:18–22).¹²

The tribulation will be a time in which prophecy will be restored to Israel during the seventieth week of Daniel. Thus, Jesus provides instruction warning the nation of Israel to exercise discernment concerning this matter. Ware further explains:

Whom then could Jesus be warning? Obviously the warning is to Israel through the Apostles (who represent their nation Israel—this nation that anxiously looks for her Messiah). Jesus warned Jews in the tribulation not to be deceived by false Christs no matter what signs and wonders they perform. *Israel* is in danger of following false Christs because she has not yet recognized the true Christ. Unquestionably this is another example of exclusively Jewish element in the context of the Olivet Discourse which proves, along with the other contextual items not handled by Gundry, that Jesus addressed the nation Israel and its future in accordance with the intent of His Apostles’ questions.¹³

CONCLUSION

This passage lays out a future time of great persecution and hatred. Robert Gundy says, “Throughout , we see a logical progression: persecution by outsiders causes many in the church to avoid persecution by betraying fellows disciples to the persecutors; and through failure to condemn this woeful loss of brotherly love, easygoing false prophets exacerbate the problem of treachery in the brotherhood.”¹⁴ . The events described by our Lord will occur during the future tribulation period. This time period will require great perseverance on the part of the Jewish remnant. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ William F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 760.

² Thomas Figart, *The King of The Kingdom of Heaven: A Commentary of Matthew* (no publisher given, 1999), pp. 438–39.

³ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 571.

⁴ Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14–28*, Vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), pp. 694–95.

⁵ See for example, Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, (Power Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), pp. 82–85. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Press, 1999), pp. 52–53. R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 35.

⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

⁷ Gentry, *Perilous Times*, p. 52.

⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

⁹ This cannot be fulfilled through Judas, since he was a single individual and the text says “many.” Also, Judas’ defection was at least 40 years before the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

¹⁰ See Gentry, *Perilous Times*, pp. 53–54 and DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, pp. 84–85.

¹¹ Bruce A. Ware, “Is the Church in View in Matthew 24—25?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April–June 1981; Vol. 138, No. 550), p. 169.

¹² Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, [1910] 1961), p. 484.

¹³ Ware, “Is the Church in View?” p. 169.

¹⁴ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, second edition, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 479.