

All the Tribes of the Earth Shall Mourn (Mat. 24:29-31)

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Working our way through Matthew 24

- The overall context: Jesus is responding to questions posed by the disciples in verse 3 concerning three events yet future to their day
 1. The destruction of the Jewish temple
 2. The sign of his coming
 3. And of the end of the age
- Jesus responded in verses 4-8 by describing general characteristics of the inter-advent age, and emphasized that these were not reliable indicators of His coming or the end of the age. Jesus calls this period, “the beginning of sorrows.”
- In verses 9-11, Jesus describes what conditions will be like at the end of the age
- In verses 15-22, Jesus tells us the sure sign of the end of the age: *the Abomination of Desolation*, which has relevance for all Jews and Christians, especially those living in Israel at that time.
 - It is this event which marks the arrival of the end of the age and triggers a historically unique period of global persecution and danger.
- In verses 23-30, Jesus addressed the question, “what will be the sign of your coming?”

Mat. 24:29-31

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.¹

Signs in the Heavens

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Mat. 24:29).

1. Cataclysms affecting both heaven and earth

A. Representative New Testament passages

- Luke makes clear that these cataclysmic events are not mere literary hyperbole, but real physical events which include not just heavenly bodies, but the earth and sea: “upon the earth [there will be] dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for [because] the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Luke 21:26).
- As we might expect, the last book of the Bible - the book of Revelation - also

relates the enormous disturbances which will attend the end of this age prior to the arrival of Jesus.

- At the opening of the sixth seal, Revelation records, “. . . behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’” (Revelation 6:12-17)
- At the sounding of the fourth trumpet, “. . . a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night” (Revelation 8:12).
- Later, a “. . . fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire” (Revelation 16:8).
- In the same hour as the ascension of God’s two Jewish witnesses, “. . . there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city [Jerusalem] fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven” (Revelation 11:13).
- At the pouring forth of the final bowl of God’s wrath, “. . . there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. . . .” (Revelation 16:18-19a)

B. Representative Old Testament passages

This fearful time is the subject of numerous Old Testament passages as well. In the interest of time, I only mention a small sample of the many passages which harmonize with the words of Jesus and the record of John in the Book of Revelation concerning this fearful reality which waits in the wings to enter onto the stage of history.

- The prophet Isaiah cries out, concerning Babylon, “Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, Every man's heart will melt, And they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; They will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; They will be amazed at one another; Their faces will be like flames. Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. *For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine.* 'I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, A man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, And the earth will move out of her place, In the wrath of the LORD of hosts And in

the day of His fierce anger.” (Isaiah 13:6-13)

- In prophet Joel also refers to this time of confrontation between God and men, “Proclaim this among the nations: 'Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, Let all the men of war draw near, Let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords And your pruning hooks into spears; Let the weak say, 'I am strong.' Assemble and come, all you nations, And gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; For the winepress is full, The vats overflow-For their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. *The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness.*” (Joel 3:9-16)

C. Why such cataclysmic judgment?

1. A judgment of God on a par with the flood. Wrath commensurate with another eruption of sin.
2. Judging idolatry: responding to the worship of creation over the Creator.
3. Validating the prophetic predictions of His Word.
4. Answering the scoffers of the end: “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:4).

Sign of the Son of Man

- Discussed in our [previous session^b](#) in Matthew 24.

The response

“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and *then all the tribes of the earth will [rejoice?! . . . no, mourn!]*, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mat. 24:30).

1. Joy or mourning?

- The Greek word for “mourn” (κόπω [*kopō*]) carries the meaning of “to beat one’s own breast” - a strong expression of grief or remorse, as in lamentation (Rev. 18:9). This word is used to describe the wailing of Jairus’ family at the death of his daughter (Luke 8:52).
- This verse conveys the state of mankind at the time of the Second Coming: a continued rejection of God.
 - The arrival of Jesus *ought* to be the occasion for tremendous joy and celebration - and so it is for those who wait for Him.
 - Yet Scripture records that the predominant emotion upon His arrival will be one of *mourning!*
 - From this fact alone we can conclude that the world will *not* be won to Christ prior to His return -- a fact which some Christians prefer to ignore, but which many passages make clear.
- The predominant global response at the return of Jesus is also recorded in the book of

Revelation. “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:7).

- Notice that John differentiates between two categories of people who will mourn at the return of Jesus, “. . . every eye will see Him, *even they who pierced Him*”
- Although all the families of the world will mourn, John emphasizes a particular subset who He refers to as “those who pierced Him.” The inference is that these bear a greater responsibility for His rejection at His first coming and therefore would naturally incur deeper remorse and mourning at His appearing.
- Zechariah agrees. In a passage concerning the time of the end when all nations are gathered against Jerusalem, Zechariah indicates that God “. . . will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn” (Zechariah 12:10).
- Zechariah, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, identifies who bears primary responsibility for having pierced Jesus: *the house of David and . . . inhabitants of Jerusalem, His own people, the Jews.*²

2. An immense historical blunder!

- As we would expect, the words of Jesus in this passage of Matthew agree with the inspired words of the OT prophet Zechariah and the apostle John: *at the return of Jesus, the world -- and especially His own people, the Jews -- will come to understand their participation in the greatest blunder of all History.*
- It will dawn upon the Jews that they crucified their king!
- It will dawn upon the people of the world that they have rejected God, the very Creator Who made them and even now upholds their every breath, every heart-beat!
- The realization of their certain and impending destiny in the Lake of Fire, Hell itself - a concept which many of these no doubt recently ridiculed - will be the occasion of immense stress and grief.

Gathering the Elect

“And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mat. 24:31).

- There is unfinished business at the end of the Tribulation in preparation for the thousand-year reign of Jesus from Jerusalem upon the throne of David (Rev. 20:4)
- When considering this verse, it is valuable to ask the standard trio of WHO, WHERE, and WHY questions:
 1. WHO are the elect?
 2. WHERE are the elect gathered from?
 3. WHY are the elect gathered?

1. Who are the *elect*?

- The word *elect* is the translation of a Greek word (ἐκλεκτους [eklektous]) meaning *chosen ones or selected ones*.
- These are referred to as *His* elect. That is, they are individuals who have been chosen

or selected by Jesus.³

- Scripture records various persons who are said to be chosen or selected by God:
 1. Angels who remain true to their service to God, are said to be “elect” (1Ti. 5:21).
 2. Believers, who are born of God, are said to be “elect” (e.g., Rom. 8:33; Rom. 11:5-7; 1Th. 1:4; 2Ti. 2:10; cf. John 1:12-13).
 3. Individuals making up national Israel, are said to be “chosen” and “elect” even when in unbelief and opposition to the gospel (Rom. 11:28-29).⁴

2. Where are the elect gathered from?

- Matthew tells us they are gathered “from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mat. 24:31).
 - On the face of it, this sounds quite ethereal, as if the these elect are not to be found upon the earth.
 - Upon examining related passages, we find that the phrase “from one end of heaven to the other” need not refer to heaven itself, but is used as a figure of speech to describe a global distribution upon the earth.
 - Concerning God’s promises to Israel, we read, “Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out *to the farthest parts under heaven*, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers” (Deuteronomy 30:1-5).
 - At the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah prays, “Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out *to the farthest part of the heavens*, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name” (Nehemiah 1:8-9).
 - A similar result attends a study of the related phrase, “four winds”:
 - Concerning the judgment of Elam, God declares through Jeremiah, “Against Elam I will bring *the four winds From the four quarters of heaven, And scatter them toward all those winds; There shall be no nations where the outcasts of Elam will not go.*” (Jeremiah 49:36)
 - Concerning the widespread dispersion of Israel in response to the invasion of Babylon, Zechariah declares, “‘Up, up! Flee from the land of the north,’ says the LORD; ‘for *I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven,*’ says the LORD” (Zechariah 2:6).
- This terrestrial meaning of both phrases finds further support in the parallel passage in Mark which describes the gathering of the elect, “And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of *earth* to the

farthest part of heaven” (Mark 13:27).

- It would seem that at least some of the elect are to be found distributed to the four corners of the earth at the return of Jesus.

A. How did they come to occupy all lands?

- When we consider the context of the passage, once again we note the Jewish aspect of what Jesus has said.
 1. Jesus warned that upon seeing the *abomination of desolation . . . standing in the holy place* that those in Judea should flee (Mat. 24:15).
 2. Jesus also said to *pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath* (Mat. 24:20).
- Is it mere coincidence that Old Testament passages we just examined which refer to being scattered “to the farthest parts under heaven” and being “spread abroad like the four winds of heaven” happen to describe the dispersal of Israel out of their land, the Promised Land?
- A careful study of Revelation 12 will show that the woman, representing the believing Jewish remnant prior to the return of Jesus, flees to a particular place which God has prepared for her. Yet the passage also records that after Satan is blocked in his pursuit of the woman, “he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”. (Revelation 12:17)

I. Jacob’s Trouble

- Not all of the persecuted Jews find their way to protection in the wilderness. It appears that others go into hiding wherever they happen to be among the nations.
- A lengthy passage in the 20th chapter of Ezekiel appears to speak of these Jews who undergo global persecution during the time which Jeremiah referred to being “Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7):

"What you have in your mind shall never be, when you say, 'We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone.' "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you," says the Lord GOD. "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; *I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel.*" . . . [then, regarding those Jews who turn to God through faith in Jesus, it is said] "I will accept you as a sweet aroma when *I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered;* and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles. Then you shall know

that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed." ⁵

- There are strong parallels between the words of Ezekiel and this passage in Matthew: a Jewish dispersion, a time of persecution, resulting in the realization of the historic sin of the nation in having rejected God, manifested by Jewish unbelief and rejection of the work of their own Messiah Jesus on the cross.
- There is also a unity with which the OT passages we have mentioned concerning cataclysmic disturbances associate them with the eventual gathering of Israel back to her land -- a gathering which the prophet Amos assures us has never been historically fulfilled because then it will be permanent: "I will plant them in their land, And no longer shall they be pulled up From the land I have given them,' Says the LORD your God" (Amos 9:15).

II. Trouble for All Believers

- We would be remiss to conclude that the gathering spoken of here only concerns Jewish believers at the time of the end.
- Some of the things Jesus relates in this passage are much broader than the local Jewish context.
 1. Jesus describes a global persecution and betrayal of all believers which closely parallels the teaching of the book of Revelation, especially at the hand of the Beast mentioned in its 13th chapter (Mat. 24:9).
 2. Jesus indicates that for the sake of the elect, God will not allow this time of intense tribulation to continue indefinitely or else no flesh would be saved (Mat. 24:22). This speaks of *all flesh*, not just believing Jews.

B. Are some of the Elect Gathered from Heaven?

- The parallel passage in Mark mentions a gathering from both "the farthest part of earth" to "the farthest part of heaven."
- Need not necessarily mean heaven as opposed to earth, but seems to leave this possibility open.
- Thus, the gathering may also have in view the resurrection and glorification of Old Testament believers following the return of Jesus in order to participate in the millennial kingdom which follows.
- We know from other passages in Daniel and Revelation that believers of all ages will be raised to participate in the millennium (Dan. 12:2,13; Rev. 20:4).
- However the passage does not explicitly mention a resurrection.

3. Why are the elect gathered?

- In answering the question, *Where are the elect gathered from?*, we saw the consistent promise of the OT concerning promises and curses attending obedience or

disobedience of Israel. In response to disobedience, Israel is scattered from her land. When she repents and turns back to God, she is to be gathered back to occupy the land. During this period of tribulation, Israel will be purged of her disobedience such that she will turn to the Lord (Rom. 11:26-17). In response, Jewish believers will be gathered from all the nations back to the Promised Land in preparation for the millennial kingdom to follow.

- Scripture also records a gathering of all the living among the nations at the “sheep and goat judgment” which occurs at the return of Jesus (Mat. 25:31-32). Some from among the nations will be found to be sheep rather than goats. These enter the millennial kingdom, having demonstrated their faith by their actions in relation to the persecuted Jews during their time of need (Mat. 25:34). Thus, these are also numbered among the elect. They too are gathered

Summary

- In concert with the OT prophets and the book of Revelation, Jesus predicts that this age will end with a series of cataclysmic celestial and terrestrial disturbances as God steps into history to judge rejecting humanity.
- The cataclysmic signs will culminate with the sign of the Son of Man - an unmistakable global revelation of the return of Jesus in His divine glory.
- The prevailing response upon the return of Jesus will be one of mourning, grief, and lamentation.
 1. The Jews will mourn as they realize they, as a nation, rejected and murdered their own Messiah.
 2. The nations will mourn at having rejected God’s offer of salvation and the realization of their impending doom.
- The angels will gather God’s elect in preparation for participation in the millennial kingdom on earth. This is the time when the Lord’s prayer finds its fulfillment: “Our Father, Who is in heaven, hallowed by Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on *earth* as it is in heaven” (Mat. 6:9).

Although God has revealed the fate which the world is presently hurling towards, relatively few believe the Bible. They scoff at its record of history, just as they reject its prediction of the future. Even so, our prayer is that God would open the eyes of the scoffers so they may not be found among the mourners at the return of Jesus. How much better to attain eternal life and look forward with great expectation and joy for the return of Jesus Christ.

Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Mat. 24:29-31
2. In the interest of time I am unable to discuss the [numerous problems](#)^c with the view taught by some that these passages pertain only to mourning on the part of “the [Jewish] tribes of the [land].”
3. Although it is beyond the scope of our treatment here, this choosing or selection reflects the will of God and is initiated according to His will. It is not referring to a choice which Jesus made *in response* to His knowledge of a future action or response on the part of these individuals -- which really is no choice at all since this scheme twists Biblical election in attempting to wrest the locus of control from the Creator to the creature.
4. Concerning God’s choice of the nation Israel, see Ex 3:7; Ex 3:15; Ex 3:18; Ex 6:6; Ex 19:5-6; Ex 34:10; Le 20:26; De 4:7-8; De 4:34; De 4:37; De 7:6-8; De 10:15; De 14:2; De 26:18-19; De 28:10; De 32:8-9; 2Sa 7:23-24; 1Ki 8:53; 1Ch 16:13; 1Ch 17:21; Ps 47:3-4; Ps 105:6; Ps 105:43; Ps 106:5-7; Ps 135:4; Ps 147:19-20; Isa 41:8-9; Isa 43:1-4; Isa 43:10; Isa 43:15; Isa 43:20-22; Isa 44:1-2; Isa 44:21; Isa 45:4; Jer 10:16; Zec 8:23; Mt 24:22; Ac 13:17; Ro 9:4; Ro 11:5.

5. NKJV, Ezekiel 20:32-43

Sources:

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Links Mentioned Above

a - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.

b - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Matthew_24-25/05_Matthew_24_23-30/index.htm.

c - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/topics_by_tony_garland/08_revelation_1.7_past_or_future/index.htm.