

# **Is the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse?**

## **The Answer Shows that the Rapture Could be Sooner than We Think**

**By Mondo Gonzales**  
**Co-host at Prophecy Watchers Ministries**

There are generally two perspectives when addressing the question of whether Jesus discusses the rapture in the Olivet Discourse (**hereafter “OD”**). One line of thinking is that the OD (found in Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21) does not address the rapture, nor the church, but is exclusively in reference to the nation Israel during the final 7-year tribulation (the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel). The other interpretation notes that Jesus does indeed address Israel, but His language in the OD addresses a far broader audience not only in topic, but also in those events which affect the entire world including the church. Notice the universal cosmic language of Luke 21:25-26, *“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, <sup>26</sup> people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken”* (compare also, Matthew 24:14, gospel being preached in the whole world). These are just a couple of examples that Jesus’s teachings in the OD are much broader than just Israel alone. There are excellent Bible teachers on both sides of the debate and this article is intended to provide evidence that the rapture is indeed addressed in the OD. It is offered in a spirit of gentleness and respect with those who might have a different perspective (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). I will address some parallel passages that shed light on the OD as well as examining the ways in which the descriptions of the tribulation period in the book of Revelation provide a background for understanding the consistency of end time prophecy.

One of the most important aspects in trying to answer our question about the rapture is seen in a comment made by Jesus, right in the middle of Matthew’s rendition of the OD. Jesus says, *“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (Matt. 24:44). It appears only twice in the gospels (also in Luke 12:40). We will examine this verse contextually in two sections and how it helps contribute to understanding the OD. Further, what does it mean when Jesus says, “the Son of Man is coming”? How does an “hour you do not expect” contribute decisively to the timing of the rapture and its presence in the OD? We will address these in two parts.

### **Parallel Passages in Luke Which Help to Understand the ‘Coming of the Son of Man’**

In addition to the OD chapters as noted above, Luke has included two other sections which deal with eschatological themes spoken by Jesus. Based on a harmony of the Gospels, it is reasoned that Jesus preached Luke 12:35-48 approximately 5 months before the OD. As His passion week came closer, He preached Luke 17:20-37 about 2 weeks or less before He gave the longer OD two days before His death. This is important as we compare the particular themes and angles that each gospel writer intended.

*“Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (Matt. 24:44; Luke 12:40). Remember, this teaching appears in two versions and two different time periods. When contemplating the Matthew version of this verse, it is logical to ask, “Who is Jesus talking to here?” Is He giving this as an admonition to the world? To unbelievers? To believers? In the OD and two days before His death, Mark 13:3 reveals that Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Jesus privately, while on the Mount of Olives, to explain His comments about the temple being destroyed. In a narrow sense, Jesus was speaking to those four privately. This reveals that the primary (not only) intended audience for the OD were believers. Jesus had already given encouragement to those disciples who would be persecuted for their faith in the early years of the church. Those that endured to the end would be saved (Matt 10:22). Further, Jesus revisits this theme and gives encouragement for those that became believers after the rapture. They would find themselves in the early part of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel and the persecution which would happen during that period (Matt 24:13).

Who is Jesus' audience in the other parallel passage? In the Luke 12:40 version, it is revealed exactly who Jesus is addressing. Notice the likeness in language and further expansion by Luke.

*<sup>39</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. <sup>41</sup> Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" <sup>42</sup> And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? <sup>43</sup> Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. <sup>44</sup> Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions" (Luke 12:39-44).*

I am so glad that Peter asked who the intended audience of the parable was supposed to be. No doubt, there are truths and warnings for everyone in general, but Jesus responds with an answer, albeit indirectly. The parable is for the one who is claiming and or seeks to be a *"faithful and wise manager"* of the master's household. Unbelievers do not claim or seek to be wise managers of Jesus's household. This parable is for those claiming to be believers. Now, here is the point. Jesus makes it clear that we have the responsibility to be ready so that His coming is not like a thief to the wise and faithful manager. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that He will come like a thief upon believers who are ready. At the same time, Jesus said to us that He is coming at an hour we do not expect. How can this be true? Even though we know the general times and seasons (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4) and that the tribulation period (day of the Lord) will not surprise us, there is still an element spoken of by Jesus that His coming will be at an hour that we do not expect.

In order to get to the bottom of this puzzle, the next question that needs to be explored is whether Jesus is referring to His coming at the rapture or His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in great glory at the end of the 7-year tribulation period. If we can shed more light on this question, we will be able to more fully understand the context of Jesus saying that *"No one knows the day nor the hour"* in the OD (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). We must remember that Jesus had given a mini sermon concerning His return in Luke 17:20-37 about a week or so before the longer sermon of the OD. This mini sermon uses similar language to that which Jesus gave on the Mount of Olives a couple days before His death (Matthew 26:1; Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1).

Let's begin by examining the context of Luke 17:20-37. Luke writes, *"Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you'"* (Luke 17:20-21). Jesus makes sure the Pharisees know that the kingdom of God arrived in the person of Jesus Himself. However, He declines to reveal to them any more information about the nature of the kingdom, but does turn to explain more details to His disciples. One of the most important aspects of this kingdom comes in what He describes next. I want to highlight some of the more important points through underlining.

*<sup>22</sup> And He said to the disciples, "The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. <sup>23</sup> And they will say to you, 'Look, there!' or 'Look, here!' Do not go out or follow them. <sup>24</sup> For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in His day. <sup>25</sup> But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation"* (Luke 17:22-25).

The phrase *"days of the Son of Man"* only occurs in 17:22 and 17:26 (using a plural for "days"). This is extremely vital to connect this idea with the next illustration about Noah and Lot. But first, Jesus shares with His disciples standing in front of Him that they would long to see the events of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, but they were not going to observe it. It was far off into the future after their deaths. This helps to understand what He meant by telling the Pharisees that the kingdom had already come in some way. Yet He reveals to the disciples that indeed the kingdom has come, but the end of the age fulfillment of that kingdom (*"the days of the Son of Man"*) would occur in the distant future. Therefore, they should not be deceived if someone tells them it has arrived in

their lifetimes. Jesus assures them that it will not, but when it does happen in that distant future, it will be unmistakable.

Further, Jesus reveals that the concept of His future (2<sup>nd</sup>) “coming” happens over a period of “days.” This is not accidental and can only be interpreted in parallel within the subsequent context. The entire theology of the “2<sup>nd</sup> coming” of Jesus is equated to be a period of time which Jesus labels as “*the days of the Son of Man.*” Before giving the comparison with Noah and Lot, Jesus warns a future generation against being deceived that His coming in great glory would be in secret (17:23). In fact, His final return will certainly occur on a specific day (“in His day”- Luke 17:24) and involve tremendous luminescent displays of cosmic glory (like lightning) in the midst of darkness (cf. Matthew 24:27-30). Yet He reminds them that even though He will come in glory on a future day, He must first be killed by that generation (17:25). What we learn from this passage so far is that the entire scope of Jesus’s 2<sup>nd</sup> coming involves a period of “days” up to and including the final culmination of His return on a specific single day. Jesus continues by providing an illustration to help us understand the nature and conditions of the “*days of the Son of Man.*”

*“<sup>26</sup> Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. <sup>27</sup> They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. <sup>28</sup> Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot-- they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, <sup>29</sup> but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all-- (Luke 17:26-29).*

Even though Matthew brings up Noah in his version of the OD (Matt 24:37-39), this is the only place where Lot occurs in the context of comparison to the period of time involving Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. The “days” of each person that Jesus mentions includes descriptions of the immediate period of time before judgment came, but also includes the judgment itself. The flood judgment came in the days of Noah. The fire and brimstone judgment came in the days of Lot. The judgment of the Son of Man (the 7-year tribulation) arrives in the days of the Son of Man. Jesus provides the two illustrations of Noah and Lot and then summarizes the “*days of Son of Man*” when He says, “*It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed*” (Luke 17:30). Some people can get confused as to why Jesus switches to the singular “day” in this verse. We already know from the context of 17:22 that Jesus is discussing the “*days of the Son of Man.*” He began by using a plural to guide the rest of the discussion and is also confirmed by the pattern. Additionally, it is well known in the Old Testament that the coming 7-year tribulation is called the “day of the Lord,” but reflects a period of time and not just one day. This same usage is found in the New Testament and includes the entire 7-year tribulation period which comes as a thief in the night on an unsuspecting world (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). We are not left guessing of Jesus’s use of the singular “day,” because He explains how we are to interpret it in the two illustrations of Noah and Lot. In 17:30, we read “*It will be just the same.*” The Greek is “*kata ta auta*” and literally reads, “according to the same” which is in reference to Noah and Lot. Another way to translate it is “according to this pattern.” The Greek *auta* is plural and helps show that the pattern involves that which is more than one. The phrase only occurs 3 times total in the entire New Testament and the other two instances are also in the gospel of Luke which is very helpful in understanding Luke’s meaning. When you read Luke 6:23 and 6:26, both are discussing the manner/pattern in which the Jewish forefathers operated. Notice how the NKJ translates the phrase “*kata ta auta*,” I will underline the Greek phrase as it appears in English, “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward *is* great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets” (Luke 6:23). In other words, “according to this pattern” of the ancient forefathers is how many believers will be persecuted which results in great reward.

It would be helpful to address an objection at this time raised by some Bible teachers. Dr. Andy Woods, with whom I have great brotherly respect, has an excellent series on the Olivet Discourse on You Tube. I agree with Dr. Woods on 99%, but as it regards to whether the rapture is found in the OD, I do not see it the way he does.

He does not believe the rapture can be found in the OD or in Luke 17. One of his objections in his video (Rapture Sermon Series 28) addresses the parable of Noah and Lot (Matthew 24:37-39). He references Dr. Roy Zuck's book on Bible Interpretation concerning parables (page 215). He quotes Dr. Zuck saying that parables only usually have one major point. The point of the parable of the days of Noah, according to Woods and Zuck, is simply the idea of being unprepared. I agree this is a major point, but not the only point.

In the following paragraph of the same book, Zuck writes this, "However, in support of the major point, some details in the parables are analogous to certain spiritual facts. Sometimes this is necessary for the major point of the parable to be fully drawn. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the shepherd obviously represents Jesus, the 1 sheep represents a lost sinner, as Jesus explained in Luke 15:7, and the remaining 99 sheep represent "righteous persons who do not need to repent." And yet other details such as the open country, the shepherd's shoulders, and his home and friends and neighbors should not be made analogous to some spiritual elements. They simply are parts needed to make the story lifelike and to add local color...Sometimes Jesus did explain a number of the details of a parable, as in the Parable of the Sower in which He explained the meaning of each of the four places where the seed fell (Matt. 13:18-23; Mark 4:13). He also interpreted several details in the Parable of the Weeds, including the sower, the field, the good seed, the weeds, the enemy, the harvest, and the harvesters (vv. 37-39). Since Jesus did not normally point up analogies in all parts of His parables, these examples in Matthew 13 should be seen as exceptions" (page 215-216- my emphasis).

Who decides which elements are the exceptions? No doubt Dr. Zuck is correct in providing some general guidance in interpreting the genre of parables. Nevertheless, Zuck acknowledges that Jesus's extra details concerning the parable of the sower are important aspects of understanding the full message of this parable. Interestingly, Jesus teaches the disciples that His true interpretation of the parable of the sower provides some level of a pattern to understanding the rest of the parables. Mark writes, "And He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?'" (Mark 4:13).

In responding to Dr. Wood's objection, we respectfully disagree by noting that even Dr. Zuck (which he quotes) acknowledges that parables can have subpoints that are analogous to spiritual lessons. Additionally, Jesus teaches us that parable of the sower provides a pattern to interpreting other parables. This means that parables can have a major point and some minor points that are meant to be analogous and provide spiritual truths. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, in Luke 17:30, Jesus uses a plural (*auta*) in describing that to understand the pattern of the days of the Son of Man, the illustration of the days of Noah and the days of Lot involves a pattern which has plural points of similarity. Let's see how these plural points in the pattern and parallelism looks visually.

	<b>Description of Daily Life</b>	<b>Description of Rescue</b>	<b>Description of Direct Judgment</b>
<b>Days of Noah</b>	Eating, drinking, marrying, given in marriage- <b>normal activities</b>  Noah preaches in the time period prior to judgment (2 Pet 2:5)	Noah and family commanded to enter ark-  They escape and are rescued from judgment	Judgment began only after Noah went into ark, but came quickly and <b>interrupted daily normal life.</b>  Windows of heaven opened. Rain began on a certain day and lasted forty days.

<b>Days of Lot</b>	Eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building- <b>normal activities</b>  Lot vexed in the time period (“day to day”) prior to judgment (2 Peter 2:6-8)	Lot and family commanded to leave Sodom-  They escape and are rescued from judgment (except Lot’s wife who was left behind)	Judgment began only after Lot fled the city, but came quickly and <b>interrupted daily normal life.</b>  Fire from heaven came on a certain day.
<b>Days of the Son of Man</b>	The <b>pattern</b> shows us that before the judgment comes, people will be living <b>normally</b>  Two types of people will be living side by side under these normal conditions.  The <b>pattern</b> shows one group of people will be preaching and also vexed prior to the judgment arriving	The <b>pattern</b> shows us that there should also be a group to be rescued and escape coming judgment.  Rapture generation commanded “to be ready at all times”-  They will escape and be rescued from the coming judgment	The <b>pattern</b> shows us that the judgment will begin only after believers are rescued, but will come quickly and <b>interrupt daily normal life.</b>  The heavenly judgment begins on a specific day and will last 7 years, based on other passages.

This table shows that there is a clear plurality in the pattern, parallelism, and consistency in understanding Jesus’s description of the days of the Son of Man. The days of the coming of the son of Man include the description of people experiencing normal life, the rescue of a specific group, the quick beginning of direct judgment by God from heaven which interrupts daily normal life and then brings destruction to the many left behind.

Jesus continues His mini sermon about the days of the Son of Man. It is possible to outline this sermon as follows: The **Pattern** concerning the days of the Son of Man (17:26-30), The **Perspective** concerning the days of the Son of Man (17:31-33), and The **Payoff** concerning the days of the Son of Man (17:34-37).

We have seen the pattern, but Jesus goes on to explain that those who seek to be rescued need to have the proper perspective (or attitude). Jesus gives an illustration in verse 31 about the need to be single minded in regards to kingdom readiness. I always take the Bible literally and straightforward unless the context shows me otherwise. Some people could argue that Jesus is being very literal in this situation by giving instructions concerning if you are on a housetop or in a field in a future end time scenario (it is literal advice in Matthew 24:16-20 based on context there). However, the next two verses explain the illustration in that it is not necessarily an exact instruction for a future perilous situation. Jesus tells us to “*remember Lot’s wife*” (17:32) and then goes on to say, “*whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it*” (17:33). This phrase has already occurred in Luke 9:24 in the context of being a true committed disciple. Our attitude at all times should be so single minded that we will not be double minded like Lot’s wife. She actually

was led outside of Sodom by the angels with the rest of her family, but she lingered behind as Lot and the two daughters continued on without her to the city of Zoar (Genesis 19:16, 26). She sought to preserve her own life and lost it. We need to have the proper perspective so that when the days of the Son of Man come, we will follow the pattern and be one of those who are rescued. If we have this perspective, we will always be ready and avoid being caught by surprise when the Son of Man does indeed come at an hour we do not expect.

The conclusion to Jesus's mini sermon involves the payoff which will happen in the days of the Son of Man. Jesus discusses two types of people in 17:34-35. The one who is taken and the other who is left. Both words are used in a passive sense. Jesus says, *"I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left."* This language appears also in the OD of Matthew 24:40-41. The question is commonly asked, "Is the taken one saved or is the one left behind saved?" Jesus just encouraged us to remember Lot's wife (17:30). With that imagery in mind, the answer becomes obvious when comparing Lot and his wife. Clearly, Lot was taken to refuge (salvation) and his wife was left to judgment. This is the classic left behind scenario and also applies to Noah and his family. Noah was taken in the ark (in salvation) and the others left to the judgment of the flood. Darrel Bock, in his massive commentary on Luke, notes that this understanding of "taken" and "left" is consistent with Luke's use of the Greek words elsewhere. In Luke 13:35, the leadership of Israel was "left" for judgment because they rejected Jesus (Luke 13:35; cf. Matt 23:38). Also, other disciples who were "taken along" denotes a close relationship or association in a positive sense (Luke 9:10, 28; 18:31). This is not the only way to interpret these words for sure, but in the context of this passage and the gospel of Luke itself, it makes good sense.

Jesus finishes the payoff section by answering a question by the disciples. *"And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather"* (Luke 17:37). This phrase also appears in the Matthew OD (Matt 24:27-28). There, the context is referring to the end of the tribulation as Jesus is returning in great glory. Here in Luke, it is in reference to the judgment of 7-year tribulation period which certainly will involve much death. Jesus tells the disciples through His illustrations that the group which is "left" to die in judgment (like Lot's wife), will be where the birds gather to feast. Context is very important and when people die and are left on the ground, we are very aware that vultures or other birds gather around to eat the carrion.

Let's summarize this part of the article. We are ultimately considering whether the rapture is in the OD and also Jesus' comment, *"Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"* (Matt. 24:44). We learned from the patterns in Luke that the days of the coming of the son of Man involve the whole scope of the rescue (rapture) of believers before the beginning of the 7-year tribulation judgment, the entire tribulation itself, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus in great, obvious glory (like lightning across the sky).

It is interesting that the book of Revelation begins with the words, *"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place"* (1:1). As most are aware, the word revelation comes from the Greek noun *apokalupsis*. We get the English "apocalypse" from this word and it generally means to unveil, to make known, or to reveal. The book of Revelation is the revealing of Jesus Christ in His full glory. Something to ponder before we go on to the next part of this article. Most futurists believe that the 7-year tribulation occurs between Revelation 6-18 with the opening up of the seals of the scroll which leads to the trumpets and the bowl judgments. Jesus is the only one worthy to open the scroll (Rev 5:1-5). This process of opening the fullness of the scroll takes 7 years and is part of the revealing of Jesus. This verb form of this same Greek word appears in the passage we discussed above in the patterns of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:30). *"It will be the same on the day the Son of Man is revealed."* This matches well with the process as seen in the book of Revelation which takes 7 years. The "day of the Son of Man" being revealed involves the rescue, the 7-year tribulation judgment, and His return to earth in Great glory (Rev 19:11-16). This is quite consistent in

understanding that the days of the Son of Man involve a period of time lasting at least 7 years. In the next part of this article, I want to explore what Jesus means by “coming at an hour you do not expect.”

## **The Son of Man is Coming at an Hour you do not Expect**

There is not enough room in this article to do a full verse by study of the Olivet Discourse (OD), but some preliminary comments need to be made before we get into the various details of the OD.

One important hermeneutical principle that needs to be shared at this point concerns the distinction between when the Olivet Discourse was spoken by Jesus and when it was written down through Holy Spirit inspiration (2 Tim 3:16). The three renditions of the OD we have in the gospels were all written decades after the church and the spiritual kingdom had been introduced by Jesus and fulfilled/begun in Acts 2. These writers had years of practical, theological, early church-age development in their minds before they finalized their gospels in written form. No doubt each gospel writer had their own specific themes and intentions in their respective gospels. Those themes should not be ignored, but we also must remember not to force an interpretation on any passage.

For example, some Bible teachers are quite strong on requiring that Matthew’s emphasis in the OD is only about Israel and not about the church in any way at all. We might ask that if this is true, then why did Matthew avoid the most “Jewish” part of the words spoken by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse? Namely, the details of the destruction of the Jewish temple which was only included by Luke (21:20-24). These Bible teachers that claim that Matthew 24-25 are only Jewish in context are asserting a limit on the passage that is not stated overtly and has the glaring omission of one of the most Jewish aspects of the entire O.D. I am not denying that there is a general Jewish context in Matthew and all of the gospels. However, to eliminate any church or other NT theological truths in embryonic form right at the start of interpretation is an aspect of eisegesis and biased pre-supposition. Further, it should be noted that Matthew is the only gospel which specifically writes using the Greek term *ekklesia* (church- 16:18 and twice in 18:17). Matthew even brings up the typical Jewish epithet “Son of Man” in connection with his introduction of the church in 16:13-18. This guides us to realize that Matthew might have a broader theological emphasis in the OD than some claim.

As we seek to understand fully the entire OD, it would be helpful to think in terms of the similarities we will see from what we have already explored in the gospel of Luke and comparing it with Matthew’s rendition of the OD. Let’s focus on the phrase and context of “*that day and hour*” with a few other highlights.

*“<sup>36</sup> But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. <sup>37</sup> For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. <sup>42</sup> Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matt. 24:36-44).*

Our main goal is to understand Matthew 24:36 and whether it refers to the rapture or the Second Coming. Arnold Fruchtenbaum has an excellent harmony of the Olivet Discourse in the appendix of his book, *The Footsteps of the Messiah* in which he brings together all that is written in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21. His harmony is helpful as we continue this part of the article. We will keep our focus primarily on the version of the OD found in the gospel of Matthew as it provides the context for Matthew 24:36-44. Matthew is presenting his material in answering the questions about the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, and the

signs of the end of the age and Jesus' return (**Matthew 24:1-3**). Several items are missing from Matthew's version which are important. For example, he leaves out the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24) and the personal tribulations to be experienced by the apostles in the first century (Luke 21:12-19). Neither Matthew nor Mark mention the eschatological material about the days of the Son of Man and the days of Lot (Luke 17:22-32) in their books even though Luke uses it in chapter 17 rather than chapter 21. There is no way to grasp the full understanding of the OD unless one consults all three synoptic gospels and all the eschatological material. It will be helpful to follow Matthew verse by verse as we build the context to 24:36. I will highlight in bold the Matthew 24 verses as we build to verse 36 (along with the parallel passages).

From Fruchtenbaum's harmony, we learn that Matthew has been presenting material which covers the general characteristics of the church age (**Matthew 24:4-6**; see also Mark 13:5-7; Luke 21:8-9). He then gives Jesus's answer concerning the signs of the end of the age (**Matthew 24:7-8**; also, Luke 21:10-11; Mark 13:8). Matthew proceeds to give Jesus's teachings on the first half of the tribulation (**Matthew 24:9-14**) followed by the events of the second half of the tribulation. This includes the abomination of desolation which Luke omits entirely (**Matthew 24:15-28**; also, Mark 13:14-23). Matthew provides information about the events of Jesus's return after the tribulation (**Matthew 24:29-30**; also, Luke 21:25-27; Mark 13:24-26) and then the regathering of the elect (**Matthew 24:31**). Finally, he presents the parable of the fig tree (**Matthew 24:32-35**; Mark 13:28-32; Luke 21:29-33). This summarizes the context up to our current focus on 24:36.

Returning to Jesus's words, "*But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only* (Matthew 24:36). Is this referring to the rapture or the specific day of Jesus' coming in great glory at the end of the tribulation? As mentioned in the first part of this article, excellent Bible teachers disagree on this issue. I have over two hundred commentaries just on the gospels and, by far, my favorite is once again by Fruchtenbaum (*The Life of the Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective* in four volumes). To keep this short, he mentions five reasons why this section (Matt 24:36-42) refers to the rapture and not Jesus's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in great glory at the end of the tribulation. I will list each of Fruchtenbaum's points and add my own commentary while also addressing objections by other Bible teachers.

**First**, the Greek phrase *peri de* translated as "But concerning" can often refer to the start of a new topic or a change of subject (see 1 Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 5:1). In this case, Matthew has discussed in full the signs of the end of the age all the way up to Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in great glory after the tribulation (24:29-35) and is now introducing the new topic of the rapture. Some will object and assert that the concept of the rapture was not revealed until two days after the OD during the last supper (John 14:1-3). I have already shown that the concept of a rescue before judgment was taught in Luke 17 as a pattern to understand the "days of the Son of Man" revealing. This happened a couple weeks before the OD sermon was given. Further, Matthew has already brought up the concept of the church (16:18; 18:17) and so it would not be unprecedented to have some theological teaching concerning the future church without denying a general Jewish context of the OD. Moreover, Jesus had given a full explanation from the general characteristics of the church age all the way to His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in great glory (Matt 24:1-35). Now that He has finished answering their questions, He introduces and gives more detail of the rescue/rapture event which He previously taught approximately a week or two earlier (Luke 17). In this new topical discussion, Jesus even uses similar language of the days of Noah and one of two people being taken or left so that the connection to a rescue is unmistakable (compare Luke 17:26-27 with Matthew 24:36-42). Some Bible teachers object and state that those who advocate *peri de* are misinterpreting and force this construction to refer to some new topic that is completely foreign to Jesus's previous teaching. I do agree that this construction is used to introduce topics that are new, but related. The introduction of the new topic of the rapture/rescue at this point in the OD goes along with understanding the other details Jesus just got done teaching concerning the days of the Son of Man and His coming. It certainly is a related subject and is not completely foreign or remote to the subject of the OD. It is eschatology 101.



**Second**, no one but the Father (neither the angels nor the Son- Mark 13:32), will know of the timing of the rapture. This has been the key element of the entire rapture doctrine and the warnings to always be ready. Why? Because Jesus is returning at a time we do not expect (Matthew 24:44). The tribulation is exactly 2520 days and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus in great glory on a specific day after the tribulation can be calculated with precision from the confirmation of the covenant with Israel (the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week). Additionally, from the time of the abomination of desolation (Matthew 24:15) and the casting down of Satan from heaven (Revelation 12:6, 14; 13:5) is going to be 42 months or 3 ½ years or 1260 days exactly. Some Bible teachers argue that not knowing the “day nor the hour” (Matt 24:36) is referring to the coming of Jesus in great glory state that it was only true back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The inability to “know the day or the hour” no longer applies in the present or future tribulation period. There is no doubt that Jesus knows the timing now that He has moved beyond the limits of His earthly ministry, but He is God and this would be expected once He ascended (cf. Philippians 2:4-11). These same Bible teachers posit that the tribulation saints will indeed be able to calculate the exact date of Jesus’s coming in great glory at the end of the tribulation. Even if this is true for tribulation saints, this seems like a stretch and blunts most of the other teachings of Jesus about His coming arriving unexpectedly like a “thief” on an unsuspecting world. There are numerous parables of Jesus (Luke 12:35-48; Luke 17:20-37; 19:11-27; Matthew 24: 37-51; 25:1-30) that teach that the master or groom would be coming at a time that is unexpected with disastrous results for those not ready. This seems very difficult to put into a context of Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> coming at the end of the tribulation.

The typical response by teachers affirming a 2<sup>nd</sup> coming application of Matt 24:36 is that the unbeliever during the tribulation is unaware or dead to the things of God and therefore it still will be a surprise. My reply is that the unbeliever might indeed be spiritually dead to receiving the gospel, but it contradicts what we know about the tribulation. The unbelievers in the tribulation still reject God and do not repent (Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11), but they clearly know that the horrible judgments of the tribulation are from God. In fact, John quotes them, <sup>15</sup> *“Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup> calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, <sup>17</sup> for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?””* (Rev 6:15-17). Since they are aware that the wrath of God has arrived, it would be easy for them to get a Bible and/or read a prophecy book to gain some quick understanding if desired calculate the date of Jesus’s 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in glory. Therefore, Jesus’ return would not be like a thief, nor a surprise to these unbelievers during the tribulation. They have already demonstrated the aptitude to recognize the signs of the times. In fact, these people are not atheists. They have heard the gospel (Rev 14:6-7), know God is sending the judgments and they curse Him for it (Revelation 16:9, 11, 21); nor did they repent, but continued to worship demons (Rev 9:20-21) and the dragon/beast (Rev 13:4, 8, 12; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

In addition, we must remember that Jesus told Peter in Luke 12:39-42 that the parable of the thief was intended to encourage those seeking to be a “faithful and wise manager.” Unbelievers are not seeking to be a wise steward. The thief imagery is most explicitly intended for believers seeking to be wise managers and not specifically to unbelievers. Granted, Jesus’ message is given generally for all, but Jesus answered Peter directly on to whom the parable was meant (Luke 12:41-42). The thief imagery requires a surprise and the most logical timeframe of when a surprise would happen is prior to the arrival of the 7-year tribulation, not at the end of it.

Moreover, Jesus says to the believer that *“it will come at an hour we do not expect”* (12:40). This is consistent with 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5? Paul writes, *“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness,*

brothers, for that day **to surprise** you **like a thief**. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness” (1 Thess 5:1-5). The summary of this passage accords with the teachings in the gospels and demonstrates that Paul taught the Thessalonians well. He has informed them that the day of the Lord’s judgment (7-year tribulation) will come upon an unsuspecting world like a thief in the night. This can only refer to the timing of a pretribulation rapture event. The world is living the normal life of peace and safety (similar to Luke 17 and the days of Noah, Lot, and the son of Man) when sudden destruction comes. This group living in the days of the Son of Man prior to the tribulation will not escape any more than the people living in the days of Noah and Lot. Yet Paul says in 5:4 that the Thessalonians are not in darkness for that day to “surprise them.” Jesus never says it will come upon believers like a thief, but at an hour we do not expect.

Do we have a contradiction? The Bible never contradicts itself, but sometimes we need to look a little closer. The Greek verb used in 1 Thess 5:4 “to surprise” is used in what is known as the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood often has the nuance of possibility or intentionality in contrast to the indicative mood which indicates certainty. Paul is saying, “You are not in darkness, brothers, with the intention that the day (of judgment) will not result in surprising you like a thief” (see Wallace’s *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 473). This is consistent with Jesus’s words in the gospels. Yes, Jesus is coming like a thief in the night, but the wise and faithful steward will be ready at all times and escape this day of judgment (Luke 12:39-44; 21:34-36). The day of judgment is intended to bring destruction on unbelievers, but since we are not of darkness, our readiness is intended to mitigate any surprise judgment. This agrees with Jesus’s use of the phrase in the book of Revelation. Notice, “Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” (Rev 3:3). Jesus gives further clarification which is in harmony with Paul. If a believer is awake and ready, then it will mitigate any surprise judgment like a thief. However, there is a risk for those that are not awake and show themselves to be false professing believers (Titus 1:16; Matt 7:21-23). For them, the destruction will indeed be certain and overtake them like a thief.

What about the use of the thief imagery by Jesus, (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) (Rev 16:15)? Some Bible teachers comment that this is proof that Jesus’s use of “thief” is in reference to His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in great glory because it appears in the context right before the battle of Armageddon which happens at the end of the tribulation. It is almost universally understood that this comment by Jesus is a parenthetical comment. Is Jesus giving a warning to the tribulation saints living in the last weeks of God’s tribulation wrath or is it meant as a reminder to the original recipients of the seven churches as found in chapters 2-3? Robert Thomas, in his excellent commentary on Revelation, answers, “The possibility of this being an encouragement to the faithful to persevere could serve no useful purpose at this point. By the time of the sixth bowl, those not in a place of refuge (12:13–17) have suffered martyrdom (13:15; 14:1–5, 13; 15:2). The beast’s oppression of the saints has run its course. Therefore, this announcement is a repetition of excerpts from the two earlier messages to Sardis and Laodicea (3:3, 18); it is a call to genuineness of faith” (p. 267). This again reaffirms that Jesus’s use of the thief imagery throughout the NT is in reference to the rapture and not the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in great glory. The judgment which begins after the rapture is far more extensive than Jesus’s 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. When He returns in great glory, there is very little judgment left. For sure, Jesus will be judging those that survive the tribulation, but it will be quick and over within 75 days. The 7-year day of the Lord is a horrible time and is that which overtakes the thief according to Paul (1 Thess 5:1-5). That is what Jesus said is possible to be rescued from (Luke 17:22-37).

**Third**, the idea of “no one knows the day or the hour” denoting the rapture makes perfect sense when looking at the following verses of Matthew 24:37-39 referring to the days of Noah. As we observed in the Luke 17 passage, the days of Noah, Lot and the Son of Man, the rescue (rapture) occurs during a time of normal life

activity. We saw in the patterns/parables in part 1 of this article, that it is legitimate to focus on the minor points of these parables as Jesus said (Luke 17:30). Visuals are helpful in showing the state of humanity during the tribulation period leading up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus in great glory versus the descriptions connected with the phrase, “*But concerning that day and hour, no one knows.*” Does it refer to the rapture before the tribulation or the coming of Jesus in great glory at the end of the tribulation? This cannot be exhaustive, but I encourage you to list out all the descriptions of the 7 seals, 7 bowls, and 7 trumpets. Also, list out the descriptions of the “day of judgment” and Great Tribulation as found in the Olivet Discourse. We then can compare them to what I believe is the rapture as found in Luke 17:22-37 and the OD (Matt 24:36-39). Observe the following chart.

Revelation 6-18 “living”	Olivet Discourse “living”	The Day and Hour “living”
War, massive inflation (2 loaves of bread costing a full day’s wage), One-fourth of world killed by sword, hunger, disease, martyrdom, great earthquakes, cosmic astronomical disturbances, One-third of earth burned up, sea turned to blood, sea creatures, ships destroyed, wormwood, more cosmic disturbances in sun, moon, stars, 5 months of demon locust plague where people seek death, 200 million demons killing 1/3 of humanity, painful sores on those with mark of the beast, all sea creatures die, rivers and springs turn to blood, sun scorches mankind, periods of darkness, greatest earthquake in history, 75 pound hailstones, cursing God	Birth pains which increase in frequency and intensity. These include great earthquakes in various places, famines, pestilences, fearful sights and great signs from heaven, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom, tribulation, betrayal by family, hating of one another, false prophets and deception, love of many growing cold, people fainting from fear, Jews fleeing into the mountains to hide from the antichrist, greatest time of tribulation in the history of the world, it is so bad that if God did not limit the time period of Great Tribulation, all humanity would be eliminated, great signs and wonders to deceive, final war before Jesus returns	<u>Matthew 24:37-39</u> Noah’s Day- “In the <u>days</u> before the flood”- unaware (oblivious), eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage  <u>Luke 17:26-27</u> Noah’s Day- eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage  <u>Luke 17:28-29</u> Lot’s Day- eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building  <b>Normal everyday living</b>

Jesus said, “*But concerning that day and hour, no one knows*” and then immediately gives the descriptions of Noah’s day. These people were completely oblivious and unaware of the judgment of the flood. If we bring in the other parallel passages in which Jesus uses Lot as an example, it becomes obvious. Think of it. They were planting their crops, planning weddings, putting deposits down on the wedding venues (in our modern parlance), making business plans, having celebrations, building new barns, adding landscaping. We could go on and on. There will always be times of generic “trouble” in our world (John 16:33). Yet the descriptions seen in the examples which Jesus gives are the **normal** circumstances that He said would be occurring also at the time of the coming of the Son of Man. His coming involves a rescue, the arrival of the day of the Lord, judgment, and sudden destruction. If we compare this normal living with the living happening during the tribulation period right up until Jesus’s 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in great glory, there is no comparison. Life is anything but normal!

Using Jesus’s words in 24:38-39, “*For as in those days before the flood...so will be the coming of the Son of Man,*” we can ask if this in reference to the days before and leading up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. Are these people during or at the end of the 7-year tribulation period going to be planning a wedding, having house parties, working on their landscaping, building their shed in the backyard? People are seeking death in the tribulation, not planning a wedding (Rev 9:6). They are fainting from fear, not celebrating. They are suffering from scorching heat, hunger, thirst, darkness, and 75-pound hail stones, not concerned with building a shed or

planting (cf. Rev 7:16). “*But concerning that day and hour, no one knows*” clearly refers to the days prior to rapture and the beginning of the 7-year tribulation judgment and not to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus in great glory at the end of the tribulation.

Additionally, Jesus said that they are unaware of the impending judgment (Matt 24:39). Paul describes them as saying “peace and safety” (normal living) and are also unaware of imminent judgment. We already saw that the unbelievers during the tribulation are very aware that they are living under the wrath of God (Rev 6:17). One final thought for those Bible teachers that desire to maintain that the entire OD is Jewish in nature and does not make reference for a Church rapture in 24:36. We know from Matthew 24:15-21 that after the abomination of desolation, the Jews will be fleeing for their lives into the mountains from the antichrist (see also Rev 12:6, 13-16). Matthew 24:36-37 describes normal living conditions, but the Jews are certainly not living under normal conditions. In fact, Zechariah 13:8-9 indicates that only a third of the Jews will survive until the end of the tribulation. When Jesus returns after the Jews call Him blessed (Matt 23:39; Hosea 5:15-6:2), it will be on a rescue mission (Micah 2:12-13; Isaiah 63:1-6). The Jewish remnant will not be planting, building, selling, or planning weddings. Matthew 24:36-39, even in a Jewish context, cannot be referring to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

**Fourth**, another reason “day and hour” must refer to the rapture is in reference to the separation that takes place between those that were ready and those that were not. We have already seen from the more extensive imagery used by Jesus that the ones taken are to salvation/rescue and the ones left are left to judgment (Luke 17:26-32). This teaching in Luke was given less than two weeks before Jesus gave the fuller OD two days before He died.

In his commentary, Fruchtenbaum sees the two different Greek words for took/taken as being evidence of a difference between being taken in judgment and taken in salvation. It is true that the NASB reads, “*and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left*” (Matt 24:39-40). The ESV reads, “until the flood came and swept them all away.” He sees the second “taken” with a different Greek word as meaning the one is taken to salvation. Interestingly, the Greek word for “taken” in Luke 17:34, 35 and here in Matthew 24:40 is *paralambano* and just happens to be the same word used by Jesus in the clear rapture passage of John 14:3, “I will come again to take (receive) you to Myself.” The ones taken are to rescue/rapture/salvation to Jesus and the ones left are to the heavenly judgment (like Lot’s wife).

Bible teachers like Dr. Woods object to this interpretation based on the Greek words. For him, focusing on the word *took* in the NASB, the flood judgment took (Greek *airo*) them away and to be consistent, the man in the field “taken” (Greek *paralambano*) would also be in judgment and the one “left” would remain to be saved. Dr. Woods demonstrates convincingly that these two Greek words are used in close proximity synonymously in John 19:15-16. I agree with him and do not see that much is to be gained at all by focusing on the Greek words themselves.

However, the exegetical contribution of Luke 17:26-32 reveal conclusively that Matthew 24:39-40 should be interpreted in a similar way. Noah was taken in the ark to salvation while the flood did come and sweep people away after they had been left behind. The imagery of Lot is even stronger and we discussed that in part 1.

Furthermore, Matthew 24:40 begins with the Greek word *tote* and is known as a temporal adverb which has very specific ramifications. When a phrase begins with the word *tote*, it is showing that it is connecting sequentially with that which is preceding. Steven E. Runge explains this thoroughly in his, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, page 37. In plain terms, it means that verse 40 is illustrating clearly the principle found in verse 39. We know that during Noah’s day, those that were left behind were swept away by the flood (v. 39) and this sets a pattern for those that are “left” in verse 40. They are left for judgment which is similar to Luke 17:34-35.

Dr. Woods mentions another objection in his video which needs an answer. He believes that those taken in Matthew 24:40 are in judgment. He says that in the gospel of Matthew those that are gathered/taken are always in a negative context. He gives Matthew 13:28, 29, 30, 40, 41 as examples of where the wicked are gathered and then brought to fire (or judgment). It is true that the Greek word gathered (*sullego*) is used negatively in those verses. However, in Matthew 13:48-49 this same word is used in the context of the angels gathering the “good” (righteous) at the end of the age. Additionally, Matthew uses a synonymous Greek word (*episunago*) in showing that the angels are gathering the elect after the tribulation (24:31). Therefore, Dr. Wood’s argument is not taking into consideration all the biblical data and cannot be used as a convincing objection to seeing those taken (24:39-40) as being taken to salvation.

**Fifth**, the many passages and or parables by Jesus that teach a watching attitude is indicative that “*But concerning that day and hour, no one knows*” is a clear reference to the rapture and the ability to escape the coming day of judgment. Notice the language of Luke’s OD passage which occurs in the same sequential order immediately after the parable of the fig tree which is also written in Matthew’s OD version. For some reason, Matthew did not include this section recorded by Luke. “<sup>34</sup> *But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.* <sup>35</sup> *For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.* <sup>36</sup> *But stay awake at all times, praying that you may be in a position to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand in front of the Son of Man*” (Luke 21:34-36). Jesus gives clear instruction that believers are to watch and not get distracted with the cares of life so that the day of judgment will not come upon them suddenly like a trap. This is similar teaching to what Luke previously presented as to the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17). Here in 21:35, this “day” of judgment will come upon the face of the whole earth and not just Israel. Even more, Jesus says that there is the possibility of escaping this “worldwide” day of judgment and to stand in front of the Son of Man (cf. Rev 3:10). We know that the coming day of judgment is not just one day, but many years. Jesus has already mentioned a time of great tribulation coming on the earth which was so bad that the days were shortened for the sake of the tribulation elect saints (Matthew 24:21-22). When we are raptured and escape this time of judgment, we will stand in front of the Son of Man at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10). Seeing this passage’s location in Luke’s version sure does give evidence of a rapture (or escape) being included in the Olivet Discourse.

For the sake of argument and for those that might object, let’s put Luke’s 21:34-36 passage at the end of the tribulation period and on the specific day that Jesus is returning in great glory with His holy angels. There is very little, if any, “day of judgment” remaining when Jesus returns. He is bringing an end to the tribulation period and the wrath of God as seen in Revelation 6-18. How can “that day” be considered a trap if it is at the end of the tribulation? Why pray to escape this “day” that will come “upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth” if it is already over? Remember, the “day” that is “like a trap” includes “all these things” which are the horrible birth pains and great tribulation which Jesus just got done explaining in the previous sections of the OD. There is no time to escape “all these things” if Jesus is referring to His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in great glory at the end. The only logical conclusion based on all the evidence is that the “*day or the hour*” that no one can know is in reference to the time of a possible escape for those who are watching and praying. In other words, the rapture.

The remaining sections (Matthew 24:42-25:30) provide similar illustrations that we have already addressed in Luke 12:35-48 and 17:20-37. However, it would be good to close with the specific reminders that Jesus gives.

“*Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming*” (Matt. 24:42).

“*Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*” (Matt. 24:44).

We have seen that as long as the believer is awake and ready, the day of judgment will not overtake them as a thief in the night. At the same time, there is some element that the day still comes at a time we do not expect. Many people expect the world to descend into absolute chaos and then the rapture happens. This cannot be so.

It has been the goal of this article to provide a variety of evidences showing that the rapture does indeed occur in the Olivet Discourse. The subtitle is: “The Answer Shows the Rapture Could be Sooner than We Think.” I chose this subtitle because the world is getting inherently more evil and chaos is rising on a world-wide scale. Yet Jesus and Paul teach us that the rapture would happen in a period of relative stability when most of the world is living normal life unaware of the approaching and sudden day of judgment (Luke 17:22-37; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5). Jesus is clearly encouraging believers to be ready, because His coming in rescue is at an hour we do not expect (Matt 24:44; Luke 12:40-41). As the world transitions from relative “normal living” to something worse each day, the rescue is showing itself to be even closer than we expect. Maranatha!