

Mapping the Second Half of the Olivet Discourse Matt. 24:32–25:46



“It would seem at first glance that illustration and application would not present too many problems of interpretation, and yet in this passage, rather strangely, commentators who are quite similar in their points of view in prophecy, have differed considerably in their exposition of this last portion of Matthew 24. Some special problems of interpretation must be taken into consideration in the study of this chapter.”

~John Walvoord

“At great hesitation, I rise up in opposition to interpretations of men that I’ve known and loved all my life. The great A.C. Gabelein was my very dear bosom friend. I spent many, many hours with him in fellowship and prayer. And so with dear Dr. Ironside also. But both of these men have taught all through their ministry that this is the midnight cry of the church.”



~L. S. Chafer, *Olivet Discourse Lectures*

Presuppositions of this study:

- **a consistent, futurist, dispensational, pre-millennial, pre-tribulationism.**
- **God's plan for mankind since the call of Abraham includes one plan for Israel and Old Testament saints and a distinct plan for the Church Age and Church Age believers.**
- **Matthew is a Jewish-focused gospel, with a Jewish background Christian audience,**
- **answering specifically Jewish-background questions.**
- **The Olivet Discourse is our Lord's message which then explains the impact of that rejection on God's plan for Israel in the future.**

Mapping Matt. 24:32–25:46

Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44

No Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44

Parables:
Judgment on
Church Age
Believers at
the *Bema*

2 Parables:
Judgment on
Church Age
Believers at
the *Bema*.
2 Parables
on Survivors
of the
Tribulation
[ABAB
pattern]

3 Parables:
Judgment on
Gentile
Survivors of
the Tribulation

3 Parables:
Judgment
on Survivors
of the
Tribulation

3 Parables:
Judgment on
Jewish
Survivors of
the
Tribulation

- 1. What are the fundamental hermeneutical differences?**
- 2. How is the discourse divided: the fig tree parable or the *peri de*?**
- 3. What are some critical exegetical issues?**
- 4. How does Matt. 24:36–42 impact the interpretation of Matt. 24:43–25:46?**

Two Broad Differences: Matt. 24:32–25:46

Rapture

Matt. 24:36–44

Beginning in 24:36, the subject shifts to the Rapture.

No Rapture

Matt. 24:36–44

Beginning in 24:31, the subject shifts to being prepared for the Second Coming.

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?
2. The near context: What are the disciples asking?

Two Broad Differences: Matt. 24:32–25:46

Rapture

Matt. 24:36–44

No Rapture

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?

“Too often a study of the discourse begins with Matthew 24 rather than the argument of the Gospel of Matthew. When taken apart from the entire argument, one similarity, word, phrase, or concept, can be used to present a seemingly strong case for portions of the discourse referring to events in the Church Age. However, taken inside Matthew’s argument these points break down.”

~Jeremy Thomas

The Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

- 1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?**

No discussion; silent; “Conspicuous by its absence”

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?

Far context is significantly emphasized.

“The key to understanding the Olivet Discourse is to interpret it consistently, noting the context and the Jewish understanding of the phrase *the end of the age*. Importing the church into *this distinctly Jewish discourse confuses the interpretation.*”

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?

1. The Jewish nature of Matthew.

“The issue, however, is, What is Jesus talking about? Or more specifically, about whom is Jesus teaching? And the answer to this question found in the context of the passage is believing Israel.”

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?

2. The centrality of context

“The context does not merely help us understand meaning—it virtually makes meaning.”

~Moises Silva

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?
3. The Jewish kingdom in the 5 discourses

All five discourses teach about the relation of Israel to the Messianic Kingdom.

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?
4. No foundation for introducing the Rapture or the future church.

Neither Matt. 16:18 nor 18:17 provide content in relation to the church.

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?
5. Teaching on the Second Coming is more contextually satisfying than teaching on the church and the Rapture.

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?
6. The “No Rapture” view holds that in Matthew 24–25 Jesus is addressing the future for Israel and the church and Church Age teaching is not present.

“The Olivet Discourse does not refer to the Church Age, so it does not discuss the timing of the Rapture.”

“Let us note concerning this great eschatological discourse that Jesus was here revealing the prophetic program for Jerusalem, the nation Israel, and the people of Israel. He made no reference to the church or the prophetic program for the church. Jesus did not speak here of events that will precede the consummation of the program for the church at the Rapture (John 14:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:51–52; 1 Thess. 4:13–17). Rather, He dealt with the future Tribulation, or seven-year period that will complete the prophetic program for Israel as revealed in Daniel 9:27. *Because of its Jewish context, this portion of Scripture must be interpreted with reference to Israel and not the church.*”

“The Olivet Discourse gives an outline of *the future of Israel*—a people at the center of much of biblical eschatology ... [the disciples ask] Him three questions about *the future of Israel*.”

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?
7. The Hebrew narrative style where the general overview is stated first, then a shift in focus to a detail within that general overview follows.

Matt. 24:4–31 provides a general chronology leading up to the return of Christ, then Matt. 24:32–25:44 looks at what happens in those judgments associated with that return.

Evaluation

The greatest weakness for the Rapture view. Lack of contextual work affects later conclusions in words studies and structure.

“I heard a man give an address on the second coming of Christ: he was talking about the church and the Rapture—a man who lives in this city—and he just gathered up all these passages as arguments for the church to be watching. Now let’s settle it and have it definitely settled: we’ve not a thing here addressed to a Christian—not one thing addressed to a Christian. It’s all to Israel.

“We’ve missed very much indeed when we go through the gospel of Matthew if we do not discover what is true about the Kingdom and what is true about Israel in relation to the Kingdom. Matthew is not life truth for the Christian at all; it’s not addressed to the Christian. And whenever it’s appropriated that way it’s just full of confusion and contradiction.”

~L. S. Chafer, *Olivet Discourse Lecture Two.*

Two Broad Differences: Matt. 24:32–25:46

Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44

No Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44

1. The far context: How is this section related to the argument of Matthew?
2. The near context: What are the disciples asking?

The Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

2. What are the disciples asking?

If we do not understand the “when” concerning which our Lord speaks, we will not see the Rapture in Matthew 24.

The Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

2. What are the disciples asking?

How many questions do the disciples ask?

Some, not all, emphasize two questions, which forms the concrete foundation for their *chiasm* theory.

Others emphasize three questions.

The Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

2. What are the disciples asking?

A¹ Question: “When will these things happen?” (v. 3a)

B¹ Question: “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (v. 3b)

B² Answer: “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (vv. 4–35)

**A² Answer: “When will these things happen?”
(vv. 36–44)**

The Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

2. What are the disciples asking?

A¹ Question: “When will the Lord return?” (v. 3a)

B¹ Question: “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (v. 3b)

B² Answer: “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (vv. 4–35)

A² Answer: “When will the Lord return?” (vv. 36–44)

The Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

2. What are the disciples asking?

“It should also be noted that *Yeshua* did not answer the questions in the order in which they were asked. He answered the third question first, the first question second, and the second question last. Furthermore, not all three Gospel writers recorded all of His answers to all three of the questions. Mark and Matthew both ignored *Yeshua*’s answer to the first question, while Luke chose to record it.”

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

2. What are the disciples asking?

The number of questions is not a hermeneutical factor in their argument.

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

2. What are the disciples asking?

The first question (which is answered second) is understood to be a question about when the Temple will be destroyed. Walvoord, as just one example, argues for this position, as does Pentecost, paraphrasing the question, “When will this happen” as “When will Jerusalem be destroyed?”

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

2. What are the disciples asking?

Parousia

“This means that the first time the term is used in the New Testament it probably included a Jewish religious sense of the appearance of the Messiah to deliver.”

The No Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

2. What are the disciples asking?

Parousia

“If this is so, it gives the whole discourse in Matthew 24 an especially Jewish slant. In a word, the questions of the disciples are completely Jewish and have nothing to do with the church! The disciples did not grasp the significance of the church at this point; they only gradually began to understand how God was building His church, as the book of Acts attests. The questions of the disciples are not only related to Israel, they form the basis for the entire discourse.”

Evaluation

The *chiasm* theory is based on the much-disputed issue of the number of questions. This is a weak foundation to base the whole position on a highly disputed issue.

Evaluation

2. The *No Rapture* view appears contextually stronger. This view recognizes the context has no basis for introducing the church, or the Pre-Trib Rapture. This view emphasizes that the when question is related to when the Temple will be destroyed, not when will the Day of the Lord begin.

Evaluation

3. The argument set forth by Toussaint and Pentecost provide evidence from both a far and near context that restricts the entire discourse to a focus on God's plan for Israel. Thus showing that there is no foundation for the introducing either the church or the Rapture, which is a Church-Age-related doctrine.

Evaluation

4. “When will these things be?”

In the immediate context our Lord has announced that

- 1) their “house [Temple] is left to you desolate.” The word *eremos* can mean abandoned or deserted.
- 2) that they would not see Him again until they say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Matt. 23:39), and
- 3) that “not one stone shall be left here upon another” (Matt. 24:2).

Evaluation

5. “When will these things be?”

The plural of “these things” refers to these three things which Jesus says will happen. Specifically, when will these things happen to the Temple and the people call upon You. These “things” all occur at the conclusion of Daniel’s seventieth week. It seems forced to claim that they refer to the beginning of that seven-year period, as one writer puts it, “the disciples were asking Jesus how they could know when these end-of-the-age events begin, i.e., when the day of the Lord begins” which in his view is at the Rapture. That is a re-writing of the initial question.

“It is true that sound interpretation must begin with the grammatical sense of the text, and this does indeed hold first place in the rules for interpretation, nevertheless it is possible to trot all day in a grammatical half-bushel and fail to get the great sweep of the meaning of the broad context. Hence there are other rules, presented in a later section, which safeguard against an overemphasis of grammatical considerations.”

~Rollin T. Chafer, “A Syllabus of Studies in Hermeneutics.”

Two Structural Differences: Matt. 24:32–25:46

Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44

No Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44

1. The significance of *peri de* for the structure of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:36)
2. The function of the fig tree parable (Matt. 24:32–35)

Two Structural Differences: Matt. 24:32–25:46

Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44

No Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44

1. The significance of *peri de* for the structure of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:36)

Matt. 24:36, “But [*peri de*] of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”

The Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The significance of *peri de* for the structure of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:36)

Those who hold to a *Rapture view* emphasize the use of the Greek transitional phrase at the beginning of 24:36 as a major element in their argument. This phrase is usually translated “*but of that day*” (NKJV, NASB), “*but concerning that day ...*” (ESV), “*but as for that day ...*” (NET).

The Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The significance of *peri de* for the structure of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:36)
 1. The use of *peri de* at the beginning of a sentence introduces a new subject, thus our Lord is shifting now from discussing the Second Coming to a different event, the [Pre-Trib] Rapture of the church.

The Rapture View

Matt. 24:36–44

1. The significance of *peri de* for the structure of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:36)
2. Documentation for this usage is cited from 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thess. 4:9; 5:1
3. Argues that the analogy with 1 Cor. shows a shift of subject here.

Evaluation

1. The problem with ambiguous definitions and descriptions.

“Verse 36 is introduced by *peri de*. This Greek phrase is widely recognized as beginning a shift *in subject or perspective*.” [emphasis added]

Comment: Are “subject” and “perspective” used as synonyms, or antithetical?

Evaluation

5. Richard Mayhue observes that *peri de* is used 18 times in the New Testament, and “in all but four cases an obvious change in time or topic is implied (see Matt. 22:31; 24:36; Mark 12:26; 13:32)”.

Evaluation

Matt. 20:6, “And about (*Peri de*) the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ ”

Evaluation

Matt. 22:31, “But concerning (*Peri de*) the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying,”

Evaluation

Matt. 27:46, “And about (*Peri de*) the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*’ ”

Evaluation

The application of the meaning of a word or phrase from one author and genre to another author and genre without documenting the meaning from within the writing of phrases context fits Barr's category of illegitimate totality transfer.

Conclusion

Though the argument from *peri de* at first glance appears substantive, closer examination reveals some fundamental flaws in both the logic and the evidence. Arguments that *peri de* indicates a shift in topic in Matthew are less than convincing.

2. The function of the fig tree parable (Matt. 24:32–35)

**Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44**

**Conclusion to the first
part**

**Sets up the shift to
the Rapture.**

**No Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44**

**Transition to the next
section which is
characterized by
parables and illustrations.**

**Narrows the focus to the
application of the
previous section.**

Rapture
Matt. 24:36–44

“We have already considered some of the markers that indicate that the fig tree passage is the conclusion to our Lord’s answer to the what question.”

No Rapture View Matt. 24:36–44

No Rapture advocates indicate by their outline that Matt. 24:32 is the main division.

In the No Rapture View there is little said about the structure, except in a few commentaries. However, of those that do, several of them divide the discourse at Matthew 24:32, and have titles for the following section, such as: “Seven Illustrations of His Coming Matt. 24:32–25:30”; “Parenthetical Exhortations, Matt. 24:32–51;” “The Responsibilities of the Disciples, Matt. 24:32–25:30;” “The Confirmation by Parables (Matt. 24:32–51),” and “The Parabolic Admonition, Matt. 24:32–25:30.”

No Rapture View Matt. 24:36–44

This structure is indicated by the shift in subject to watching, which is the point of the fig tree parable, the Noahic illustration, and the subsequent parable.

The shift to the use of parables and illustrations in Matt. 24:32–Matt. 25: the parable of the fig tree, the illustration from Noah, the brief parable or illustration of the homeowner (Matt. 24:43), the parable of the wise servant (Matt. 24:45–51), the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1–13), the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30), and the final episode of the coming of the Son of Man in His glory, all focus on “watching” and “being prepared.”

No Rapture View Matt. 24:36–44

The fig tree parable teaches that the person alive at the time should be watching, “when you see all these things” (Matt. 24:33). The purpose for the comparison with Noah is stated in Matt. 24:32, “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.” The short illustration in v. 43 focuses us on the homeowner who “would have watched.” The good servant is watching for his master so he is prepared for his coming (Matt. 24:46). The lesson of the parable of the ten virgins is to “watch therefore you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming, and the parable of the talents focuses on one who was not watching and not prepared for the “coming” of the master.

No Rapture View Matt. 24:36–44

It is structurally vital to see the echo in Matt. 25:13 “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” of Matt. 24:42; “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.” This intentionally connects the illustration of Noah with all that follows through the end of at least the parable of the ten virgins. Thus showing that however, these verses are intended (Rapture or Second Coming), they must all be taken together.

The Noah Illustration: *airo* and *paralambano*

The Rapture position interprets the point of comparison as a normal lifestyle. This argument emphasizes that everything is going on in life as normal, which would not be the case if the “earth dwellers” have already gone through the seal and trumpet judgments and are now almost through the final series of bowl judgments near the end of the judgments of Daniel’s seventieth week.

The Noah Illustration:
airo and *paralambano*
The Rapture View

Argument based on the change of verbs for “took them all away” (*airo*) (24:39) changes to “will be taken” (*paralambano*) in Matt. 24:40, 41). In this view, this verb change shows that those taken are not taken in judgment, but taken in the Rapture, and those not taken are left and abandoned to go through the Tribulation.

The Noah Illustration: *airo* and *paralambano*

The No Rapture view

The point of the illustration is to be watchful.

Context informs this decision.

“It’s customary with many teachers today to draw on this to try to prove that the days of Christ are the evil days like the days of Noah, but there’s nothing here that’s said to be evil. The citing of the days of Noah is merely to show that they were taken unawares. They were not prepared and that’s the whole appeal here: ‘Watch; don’t be unprepared.’ ”

~L. S. Chafer

Evaluation

The *Rapture View* position is based on the *peri de view*.

Argument from *paralambano*, ignores evidence.

Evaluation

1. Little seems to be said to argue contextually that the point of comparison is normality. This conclusion is assumed and asserted, rather than demonstrated, as if the meaning of the illustration analogy is self-evident. In contrast, the No Rapture View argues contextually that the point of comparison is based on the commands to watch and being ready. The fig tree parable enjoins the reader to learn and to watch for all of these signs to take place.

Evaluation

2. Second, the concluding admonition is to “watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.” This is then followed by a brief illustration related to the thief, but the point is given in Matt. 24:44, “therefore you also be ready.”

Evaluation

5. The word studies done on the shift between *airo*, *paralambano*, and *aphiemi* must be evaluated closely. ... Most Rapture View advocates agree with No Rapture View that *airo* in 24:39 refers to those taken away in judgment, but the shift from *airo* to *paralambano* in vss. 40, 41, in the Rapture View, indicates that a difference is emphasized, those taken in these verses are taken in the Rapture, and those left are abandoned on the earth for judgment. The arguments for that view must be carefully analyzed.

Critique of Michael H. Burer

NET note

***sn There is debate among commentators and scholars over the phrase “one will be taken and one left” about whether one is taken for judgment or for salvation. If the imagery of Noah and Lot is followed, the ones taken are the saved. Those left behind are judged. The imagery pictures the separation of the righteous and the judged (i.e., condemned) at the return of the Son of Man, and nothing more.**

“The imagery itself lends the most credence to the interpretation that those taken away are taken for salvation. In the original narrative about Noah, God was gracious to save Noah from judgment by taking him off the earth and placing him in the ark. He was “taken away” from the place where God’s judgment was poured out to a place of safety in the ark. Thus the reference to Noah lends more credence to the interpretation that those taken are taken for salvation.”

~Michael Burer

1. According to Burer's understanding those taken (*airo* vs. 39) are the saved (Noah, Lot). But a careful reading of the text in Matt. 24:39 indicates that those taken away are those "who did not know" and are taken when the flood came, not those in the ark. Such an egregious exegetical error and misrepresentation of the text should give us pause in accepting any other conclusions.

2. Burer admits the first glance reading in the English seems to imply a judgment nuance to *paralambano*, and even though he explains that away, he still admits that the context involves judgment. His analysis of *paralambano* is important. He states that of Matthew's sixteen uses of the term, seven are neutral, and only one has a negative context. [emphasis added] This interpretation is challenged:

3. Burer needs to be fact-checked on his data. Of his seven neutral uses, he concedes only one as negative, Matt. 27:27, where Jesus is taken by the soldiers into the Praetorium. However, it could be argued that the devil taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple or to a high mountain (Matt. 4:5, 8), is neither positive nor in safety, but is primarily negative.

When a word can take one of two contrasting nuances, then context plays a much larger role. To strengthen their argument, the Rapture position needs to relate this meaning to the context, both near and far. Further, to substantiate their meaning, it would be beneficial to recognize that the shift from *airo* to *paralambano* does not provide the evidence desired. Based on the evidence, the claims of the No Rapture View seem stronger based on immediate, near, and far context. Other evidence must be considered.

***Aphiemi*: “Left Behind” or “Abandoned”**

Rapture View

- 1. One form of the Rapture View posits that *aphiemi* is best understood to mean, “abandoned.” This is within the range of lexical possibilities.**

1. Burer is again referenced for support. He claims the main meaning is “abandon” or “forsake” and cites Matt. 4:20, 22; 8:22; 19:27, 29; 23:23, 38; 26:56; and 27:50 as evidence.

2. The meaning of the verb “abandon” in the COED has three meanings, only the first two apply here:

1 give up (an action or practice) completely;

2 desert or leave permanently.

3. It should also be noted that in many cases where there is a judicial or judgment context, the word group has the nuance of “forgive” which means to exempt from guilt or punishment. This latter idea embodies the realm of meaning of forgiveness or exemption from punishment which easily fits the context for the *No Rapture View*. In that view, those who are taken are taken to judgment, but those “left” are not abandoned, but exempted from judgment and punishment, they are the forgiven ones because they trusted in the gospel of the kingdom during the Tribulation, and are therefore, under the third meaning, separated from those taken in judgment, and as forgiven ones are left to enter into the kingdom.

“And so in connection with the glorious appearing of Christ, those that are taken are taken in judgment and those that are left are left for the kingdom blessing. But it does not mean that this is the church or the Rapture at all; be careful about such foolish mistakes as that.”

~L. S. Chafer