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The Olivet Discourse (Part 2)



When Shall These Things Be? - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg discusses the Olivet Discourse and the meaning behind certain biblical verses. He highlights the significance of the disciples' question about the timing of certain events and analyzes the language and vocabulary used in the discourse. Gregg explores the interpretation of "this generation" and its relation to the fulfillment of prophesied events. He concludes by discussing the non-literal nature of certain biblical language and suggests that the events prophesied in the Olivet Discourse have already taken place.

Transcript

We want to finish up our consideration of the Olivet Discourse now. The Olivet Discourse, referring to that discourse which is found in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 and Luke 21. I had you looking last time at this handout that I've given you which has all of the Gospels accounts of this discourse side by side for comparison.

I did this for my own benefit years ago and it's so good. I wanted all my students to be able to look at it because I have always found certain things about the Olivet Discourse perplexing. Still do.

There are some things I don't quite know what to do with, but just because there are some things that I don't understand doesn't mean that I don't want to understand as much as I can. And to a certain degree, I feel that by comparing these three accounts of the same sermon side by side, it has helped me to understand more what is being discussed. And as I pointed out last time, Luke and Mark record the disciples asking two questions.

On the occasion that Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, they asked him when and what will be the sign that it's about to happen. When shall these things be and what shall be the sign that these things are about to happen? And Jesus, I believe, answered both of those questions. As far as when shall these things be, his answer was, this generation shall not pass before all these things are fulfilled.

So that is when. Well, the answer is within this generation. The other question was, what

shall be the sign that these things are about to happen? And he said in Mark and in Matthew's version, when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not, then you know that it's near.

Then you know it's time for you to flee. It's about to happen. In Luke's version of the same statement, Luke put it this way, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is near.

So we see that Jesus answers both questions. Now, the confusion has historically arisen on this discourse because of the way that the disciples' question is represented in Matthew's gospel. There's no problem in Mark and Luke 21.

Well, I shouldn't say there's no problem, but there's less of a problem in Mark 13 and in Luke 21. But in Matthew 24, there's a bit more of a problem. And that is because Matthew renders the question that the disciples ask differently.

He has them asking, as do the other versions, when shall these things be in verse 3, Matthew 24, verse 3. That agrees with the first question in all the gospels. But the second question, where the other gospels have them saying, what should be the sign that these things are about to happen? Matthew renders it, what should be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? And my suggestion to you yesterday is that your coming and the end of the age is simply their way of asking about the destruction of Jerusalem. These things, as it's rendered in Mark and Luke.

In other words, the same question. Obviously, it's the same occasion in all the accounts, and therefore, it must be the same question. Therefore, it would appear that perhaps we do have a wording that needs to be interpreted by us in order for us to understand it.

We remember that the disciples were told by Jesus that his coming or that they would see him coming in his kingdom before some of them had tasted death. And that is how they understood that was probably different than we do. We understand language like that.

Most naturally, we understand of the second coming, but they would not, as I pointed out yesterday, probably have thought of it in that way because they didn't know about the second coming yet. Now, I went through the early verses of the discourse and showed you that the things Jesus predicted did happen. There were false messiahs and false prophets.

There were wars and rumors of wars. There were natural disasters, earthquakes and famines and pestilences. There were the persecutions of believers.

And there was the abomination of desolation, which Luke calls Jerusalem surrounded by armies. So, all of these things, I dare say, on the two-page handout I've given you, everything on the first of those two pages happened. And it happened and culminated in

70 AD.

Now, the reason we've looked at this discourse in the first place is because we're talking about the tribulation and the question, is there a future tribulation period described in scripture? And one of the reasons we're looking so closely at all of the discourse is because it is thought, A, it's thought to be a vivid description of such a future tribulation by many. And secondly, because it is the passage where we get the language, the vocabulary, great tribulation. The idea that there will be a great tribulation and that we should call it by that name comes initially from Jesus' own statement in Matthew 24, verse 21.

Then there should be great tribulation. The book of Revelation, which was written later, echoes this language in Revelation 7, 14. But apart from that, we don't have the vocabulary of a great tribulation.

Therefore, if we can discern what Revelation is talking about and what all of the discourse is talking about when they talk about great tribulation, it tells us a great deal about the answer to our question, is there a future great tribulation? Well, what I sought to point out to you is that in Matthew 24, 21, which uses that term, that's part of the context that begins in Matthew 24, 15. And I would say Matthew 24, 15 through 22 is one running context there. The abomination of desolation, flee to the mountains, woe to those who are pregnant in those days, then there's going to be great tribulation such as never was before.

Now that same context, that same paragraph, as it were, is found in Luke 21, verses 20 through 24. And we found there that it is a reference to the Roman armies coming against Jerusalem. It is something the disciples themselves would see, at least some of them would.

This is something very important for us to note, that throughout Matthew 24, Jesus is saying to his disciples, you, you, you, you, you, in various places. Would you look at Matthew 24 just for a moment and notice that he says to them in verse 4, take heed that no man deceives you. Who? Well, there were four disciples, Peter and James and John and Andrew were the four who he was talking privately to.

Make sure that no one deceives you. In verse 9, then they shall deliver you up to be afflicted. Remember there's four men Jesus was talking to and he said they will deliver you up to be afflicted.

In verse 15, he says, when you, therefore, see the abomination of desolation, he gave these four men reason to believe that they would see it, or at least some of them would. Verse 20, pray that your flight be not in winter. In verse 23, then if any man shall say to you, lo, here is the Christ, believe it not.

Verse 26, therefore, if they shall say unto you. Now, what's interesting is that the word you doesn't appear anymore after this. You don't find you in the later parts of Matthew 24, but interestingly, the later parts of Matthew 24, after a short space from here, parallel not Luke 21, but Luke 17.

And as I said to you yesterday, I believe that Luke 17 is about the second coming of Christ. It's a different discourse than Luke 21. Luke 21 appears to be about 70 AD.

Luke 17 appears to be about the second coming of Christ. And Matthew has combined the two discourses. Now this observation is not one that all would agree about, obviously.

And I just present it to you as my best effort to understand and make sense of the material of all the scripture. But we need to talk about one of the most difficult things. There's two very important and very difficult issues to work on here.

One is the meaning of Jesus' statement in Matthew 24, 34. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. And the other is his comments just before that in verses 30 through 31.

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. Now those verses 30 and 31 of Matthew 24, I mean, what's that sound like? Sounds like the second coming of Christ.

And yet it's after that in verse 34, he says, all these things will be fulfilled within this generation. This is a bit problematic to the modern reader. I don't know if it was a problem to the first disciples who heard it, and we'll talk about some ways that it may be resolved.

But one of the ways that probably the principal way that most modern readers have dealt with this is to say verses 30 and 31, which I just read, are about the second coming of Christ. Now even dispensationalists sometimes will admit that much of the Olivet Discourse is fulfilled in 70 AD, but they also believe that much of it is fulfilled in the end times. It's very hard to pin down a dispensationalist as to which parts of Matthew 24 they think were fulfilled in 70 AD and which part were not.

But it seems to me that everything at least up to the abomination of desolation in the Great Tribulation flows quite sequentially from the beginning of the Discourse to the destruction of Jerusalem. As far as the question of immediately after the Tribulation, those days, the sun will be darkened and so forth. It's very hard for most Christians to see that as anything other than the second coming of Christ.

But the problem with that is Jesus' statement in verse 34, this generation will not pass before all these things are fulfilled, including verses 30 and 31. Now here's how that has been resolved by some. Some believe that this generation should not be understood in the way that we usually use that term today.

Today we usually mean a generation is the people now living. The people who are roughly contemporaries of one another at one period of time is a single generation. But the word generation, we are told by some, actually can mean a family or race of people.

A generation can be those generated out of a progenitor, out of a father, out of an ancestor. So that the people who all come from a single ancestor can be called a generation regardless of how many centuries their tribe exists. That is at least what we're told.

Now I've heard much debate about this. I've read much debate about this. Some scholars say yes, the word genea can be translated that way and should be.

Others say well, it shouldn't be and it usually isn't and so forth. I mean there's different scholars differ on this. But one view at least is this, that this generation means this race or this tribe or this people group.

And then those who hold this have two opinions. Some believe that it means the Jews. This generation, the Jews, will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled.

And they think that what Jesus is getting at is this, that the great tribulation is going to be so hard on the Jews because the Antichrist is going to be persecuting them and all that, that perhaps he is saying that don't worry, the Jews will still exist. The Jewish generation, the Jewish people, the Jewish nation will exist and will not be exterminated until all these things are fulfilled. In this generation, the race of the Jews will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled.

Meaning that God will preserve the Jews. Now there are others who would agree with the use of genea or generation as a race of people and they say no, this is not talking about the Jewish race. After all, Jesus has made no reference prior to this of the Jewish race.

He's not mentioned the Jewish race in this entire discourse. He has talked about those who are in Judea, but he's addressing the Christians who are in Judea. And therefore this race, this generation, they say, should be understood of the Christians.

After all, Peter did say in 1 Peter 2 and verse 9, Peter said of the Christian church that we are a chosen generation or race. 1 Peter 2 and 9. And therefore Jesus would be saying this race of the church, this generation, the chosen generation, the people of God, the church will not pass away. He had said earlier that they'd be persecuted all over the place.

And one might think that it'd be so bad that they wouldn't survive and that the church would be wiped out. But he's saying on this theory, he is saying, well, the church will not perish. The church will not pass away before all these things are fulfilled.

So these are two theories. These theories are invoked in order to preserve the idea that verses 30 and 31 are in fact talking about the second coming of Christ and yet preserve Jesus' integrity as a prophet when he said this generation will not pass until these things happen. They're trying to say, well, how could it be that this generation will survive from his time until the second coming of Christ unless we interpret this generation to be a race of people, either the Jews or the church, depending on which theory one favors.

Now, I am not a Greek scholar and therefore I'm not in a position to assess the merits or the demerits of the view that generic should be translated a race. I am willing to accept that it might be. However, I do not believe this is the likely interpretation of Jesus' words.

And I'll tell you why when I tell you what I think is the best interpretation is. I'll tell you why I think it's the best. And rather than critique the ones that I don't think are best, you'll see that my reasons for choosing the one I consider best will be simply by the process of elimination.

The others are not the best interpretation. But a very popular way of handling this scripture today is that which Hal Lindsey has proposed and in the late great planet Earth and many prophecy teachers following him, they think that when Jesus said, this generation will not pass, it doesn't mean the generation he was living in nor the race of the Jews or of the church, but it speaks of a particular final generation on Earth. Using the word generation in the sense that we usually use it, meaning contemporaries living at the same time, that on Hal Lindsey's view and that of some others, generation means that.

But what he means is that the generation that sees a certain signal act in the end times, that generation will not pass until all these things are fulfilled. So that what he's saying on this theory is that there will be a certain thing that will happen. And the generation that sees that thing happen will not pass before the whole thing is fulfilled.

So the whole sequence of events in the last days will take place within a single 40 year period or generation. Hal Lindsey originally believed that a generation was 40 years. And he believed that the thing that would signal the beginning of the last generation was the re-institution or the re-establishment of the nation of Israel.

You know that from 70 AD on, the nation of Israel was basically defunct. And through the centuries, there was no nation of Israel. There was a race of Jewish people throughout the world, but they were not in a national, they didn't have a geographical land of their own, they did not have national identity.

But they do now. On May 14th of 1948, the United Nations declared that Israel is a sovereign state. And dispensationalists particularly believe that that was a very important prophetic event, that the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 was actually the beginning of the end times.

And that the generation that saw that happen would not pass away until Jesus actually returned. Now this view was extremely widespread in the early 80s, especially late, let's just say in the 70s and until about 1981 or 82. And the reason for that was that Hal Lindsay in his book, *The Late Great Planet of Earth* said, the generation that saw Israel become a nation is the generation that will see Jesus come back.

And Hal Lindsay said a generation in scripture is about 40 years. Therefore, since Israel became a nation in 1948, you simply have to add 40 years to that to find the outer limit of when Jesus can return. So the generation that was living in 1948, that generation would essentially end officially around 1988.

And therefore Jesus would have to come back no later than 1988, Hal Lindsay said in 1970 when he wrote *The Late Great Planet of Earth*. He was still 18 years prior to that event when he made the prediction. But he did believe that no later than 88 would be the year of Jesus coming back.

Because of this idea, a generation from the time that Israel became a nation would be the outer limit of time that could possibly be. Now he of course believes in a pre-tribulation rapture, so he felt that the rapture must occur even seven years before 1988. If 1988 is the outer limit of the fulfillment of all the things in the Great Tribulation, then the rapture coming seven years before that would have to come seven years before 1988.

So that the latest that the rapture could come, he said, was 1981. Now he didn't say this in firm terms, he just hinted at it extremely powerfully. Hal Lindsay would say, I never set a date.

And I guess there's a lot of dispensations who would say the same thing. I never did set a date, but they were very clearly saying that the generation 40 years from the time Israel became a nation would see the fulfillment of the end of the tribulation, and therefore the rapture has to come seven years before that, they said. And though they were very cautious about actually saying this is the year, it is very strongly implied in books and sermons before 1981 that the rapture would probably happen in that year.

It didn't, but later on in 1988, a guy came out with a book called *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Is to Occur in 1988*, and he was not a scholar of the Bible, but he was an engineer who had all these mathematical calculations, but they were also based partially on Israel becoming a nation in 1948, and the idea that a generation would not pass before it's all fulfilled. So he missed his prediction also. In fact, when Jesus didn't come

back in September of 88, as he predicted, Wisenot wrote a sequel to that book.

By the way, if you weren't saved in those years, you might not know this, but the book 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Is to Be in 1988 by Edgar Wisenot was sent out, as I understand it, to over a million different Christian leaders throughout America, pastors and Christian leaders. And many people took it very seriously. I'm not sure why they did it.

It was a joke. I mean, he didn't mean it as a joke. When I got a free copy in the mail, I mean, I just said it as a joke.

You know, the guy just didn't know how to handle scripture. He knew how to handle numbers. That is, not the book of numbers, but ciphers, figures, but those figures had nothing to do with the prophetic return of Christ, and it was almost embarrassingly pitiful.

This guy was on all the media and so forth. And when it didn't happen in September of 88, he came out with a sequel the next year, Why the Rapture Must Be in 1989. He said he had miscalculated because he forgot that the shift from 1 B.C. to 1 A.D. is one year, not two.

And somehow that threw his calculations off, and now he realized it was not to be September of 88, but September of 89. When the rapture didn't occur in 89, we have heard nothing more from Mr. Wisenot. It's interesting.

It's not too surprising that the man did not revise his book again after 1989, having lost so much credibility. But what is surprising is he never wrote an apology. It seems like these days a person can be a false prophet, and when it's proved they're a false prophet, no apology is required.

They can just go along quietly and hope that no one remembers what they said. There have been many, many predictions of specific years and dates of the coming of Christ, mostly based on this generation shall not pass. I forget who it was, some prophet who wrote a book called The Terminal Generation, meaning the generation that saw Israel become a nation.

All based on this assumption that Jesus said this generation shall not pass, and he meant by that the generation that would see Israel become a nation again. Now there's one question we need to ask is where did they get this business of Israel becoming a nation again? And that marking the generation that was to tick off and find the end of the world happening within its perimeters. Well, here's where they get that.

Here's how Lindsay got it. In Matthew 24, verses 32 and 33, he said, And now learn this parable from the fig tree. When its branches already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.

So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near at the doors. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Now here's how Lindsay reasoned and how many did following him.

He said, the fig tree, learn a parable from the fig tree. He says, the fig tree is an established symbol throughout scripture for Israel. Israel is the fig tree.

And Jesus said, when you see the branch of the fig tree already become tender and putting forth leaves, know that summer is near. Now he says, listen, the fig tree loses its leaves in the winter time. Just like Israel ceased to be a nation, went dead.

It was a dead entity for a while. But when Israel reestablished as a nation, it's like the fig tree is putting forth new growth, new leaves, like the springtime when the tree comes back to life. When you begin to see these new leaves and tender branches on the fig tree, know that it's near.

And then Jesus said, this generation will not pass till all these things are fulfilled. So the argument was this. Jesus was talking about Israel when he mentioned the fig tree.

And he's predicting the rebirth of the nation of Israel after the long exile of the last 2000 years. And that rebirth of Israel occurred in 1948. And Jesus indicated that that generation would not pass until these things are fulfilled, all of them.

So this is where the argument came from. Now, there's several things I'd like to say about the argument. One is that it is not the case, as near as I can tell from my searching of scripture, it is not the case that the fig tree is anywhere an established symbol for Israel.

Now, I'm not saying that the fig tree never could be used as a symbol for Israel. When Jesus cursed the fig tree, there's a good chance that that represented the cursing of Israel. But there's no established usage of fig tree, you know, through repetition of use in the Bible as a symbol of Israel.

If you would look at the term fig tree in a concordance, and look at all the occurrences in the Old Testament of it, you could look up each one, and I dare say you'd have a hard time proving that any one occurrence of them referred to Israel. The closest that Hal Lindsey can come to proving it is that in Jeremiah, there was a vision of a basket of figs, some good figs and some bad figs. The good figs represent those who had been taken into captivity in Babylon, the bad figs, those that were left in Jerusalem.

So, it is true that the generation of Jews in Jeremiah's time was compared to figs in a basket. But that's not the same thing as saying that the fig tree represents Israel. It might or it might not, but you simply cannot establish that by biblical usage.

And while it is not impossible that the fig tree could, in some instances, stand for Israel,

it cannot be said that, well, we have to interpret it as Israel here, because that's an established symbol. It is not an established symbol. It's not something frequently used.

We're not sure that it's ever used as a symbol for Israel. There are some cases where it might be, but it's not at all clear. But furthermore, even if sometimes the fig tree was a symbol for Israel, is there any evidence that it is here, in this passage? Now, what he says is, learn a parable from the fig tree.

When its branches already become tender and it puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. He didn't say the second coming of Christ is near. He said summer is near.

When? When a fig tree experiences a rebirth in the spring from its winter defoliation. So, he's making a statement from nature. Fig trees lose their leaves.

Before summer comes, they get new growth. When you see the new growth, you know summer is coming. Now, he says in verse 33, so you also, when you see all these things.

Are these things a reference to a fig tree getting new growth, or is it a reference to all the things he's been talking about earlier in the chapter? I personally think the latter opinion makes more sense. When you see all these things, know that it is near. Not summer.

Not the blooming of the fig tree, but the event that they've asked about. They said, when will these things be? Well, this generation will not pass before all these things happen. But, the fig tree is simply used as an illustration from nature.

Just as in another place, in Matthew chapter 12, or was it Luke 12? I don't want to get this wrong. Let me see here. I think it's Matthew 12.

I could be wrong. Might be Luke. Wherever it was.

Well, I don't have time to look for it. It's not where I thought it would be, but it's in there. And I know it, and you know it when you hear it.

Jesus said that you can look at the sky and see in the morning that the sky is red, and you say, oh, the weather's going to be bad. Or in the evening, if the sky is red, you say, oh, weather's going to be good tomorrow. He says, you hypocrites, you can discern the signs of the sky, the face of the sky, but you can't discern the times that you're living in.

And what he's doing is saying there are things in nature which you have learned to recognize as portents of something that's coming up. One of those things is red sky in the evening means it's going to be good weather tomorrow. You've learned how to see that.

You've learned how to see the signs in nature of something coming. The fig tree is

another example of the same thing. You've learned in nature to see that if a fig tree is getting new growth, that summer must be near.

But that doesn't mean that the fig tree or the red sky, for that matter, represents anything other than itself. He's just talking about fig trees. Now, I can demonstrate that that is his meaning in this particular context, because if you look at the parallel statement in Luke, in Luke 21, verse 29, the parallel says this, Then he spoke to them a parable, Look at the fig tree and all the trees, when they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.

Notice, he's not just talking about the fig tree as if it's a symbol for Israel. He's just talking about trees in general. Look at the fig tree and all the trees.

You can see he's just making a statement about nature. He's not using the fig tree as an image or a symbol of anything else. What he says about the fig tree is true of all the trees.

He's simply saying that in nature, there are ways that you have learned to predict the coming of summer. You can see evidence of it. Likewise, when you see certain things that he has described in this chapter happening, you will know that what he is predicting is near, whatever that is.

Now, what I've just sought to show you in the last few minutes is that there is no biblical basis for even finding the restoration of the nation of Israel in this chapter at all. And therefore, there is no basis for saying that when Jesus said this generation will not pass, there's no reason for saying that that is the generation that saw Israel become a nation since Jesus made no reference to the reestablishment of Israel as a nation. How could that be his meaning? There's another thing to consider, and that is that Jesus many times in the Gospels used the expression this generation.

By the way, it does seem to me that if Jesus was talking about some generation other than his own, he should rather have said that generation will not pass. If he's talking about some future generation far off 2,000 years from his own time that was going to see something that has not yet happened, but that generation will not pass, he should say that generation. Instead of this generation, when a man says to his contemporaries, this generation will not pass, sounds like he's talking about his own generation rather than some future one.

But let me just establish that the expression this generation is commonly used by Jesus. In the book of Matthew, I believe he uses that expression about five other times, if I'm not mistaken. And these other times, he's always referring to his own generation.

I don't have all the references here on the notes that I have, but let me see if I have them in here. Okay, let me just turn your attention to a few of these in Matthew. If you

have your Bible open, I hope you do.

Matthew 11, to show you all the times in Matthew that Jesus used the expression this generation. In Matthew 11, 16 through 19, it says, But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, calling out to their companions, saying, We played the flute for you and you did not dance. We mourn for you and you do not lament.

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, Who they? This generation. Say, He has a demon. The son of man came eating and drinking, and they, again, this generation, say, Look, a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Now, notice he says, To what shall I liken this generation? Well, they, when they saw John the Baptist, said one thing, and they, when they saw Jesus, said another thing. Who are they, then? Who is this generation? The generation that saw Jesus, the generation that saw John the Baptist, and that reacted in the manner that Jesus describes. This generation is the people living in Jesus' own day, who reacted to John the Baptist and to Jesus.

That seems obvious. Look at chapter 12 of Matthew. Matthew 12, verses 39 through 45.

We have many references to this generation. Matthew 12, 39, But he answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment with who? This generation, and condemn it. Why? Because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and there is indeed a greater than Jonah here. The queen of the south will rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it.

For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and indeed a greater than Solomon is here. What's he saying? He's saying there are two generations. One's more righteous than the other.

One will condemn the other in the judgment. There's the generation that saw, that heard Jonah speak. And then there's this generation that hears Jesus speak.

And Jesus is greater than Jonah. But the people who heard Jonah speak responded, and the people who heard Jesus speak did not respond. Therefore, Jonah's generation will rise up against the generation that heard Jesus speak, and condemn them.

Likewise with the queen of the south, or the queen of Sheba in Solomon's time. She is

more righteous than this generation, meaning the generation that heard Jesus, because one greater than Solomon had come to that generation. And queen of Sheba went to hear Solomon, but Jesus's own generation won't heed him.

When he says this generation, he's referring to those to whom one greater than Jonah came. Those to whom one greater than Solomon came. They are the generation that saw him and heard him.

His own generation is what he means by this generation. In verses 43 through 45 of the same chapter, when an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places seeking rest and finds none. Then he says, I will return to my house from which I came.

And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there. And that last state of the man is worse than the first, so shall it be with this wicked generation.

He's referring here to the fact that he had come to that generation and delivered them as it were. He brought them light. He brought them truth.

The demon of deception and darkness that they'd been inhabited by had been driven out by Jesus being there, but they did not respond to him. Therefore, the demons would come back in force, and they did in 70 AD. All you have to do is read Josephus, and you'll see very clearly that the Jewish people during the siege were acting very much like demon-possessed people, with total irrationality to their behavior.

But he is talking there about his own generation, the generation that heard him and benefited from his ministry. If you look at Matthew 23 and verse 36, you'll find the other remaining reference. Jesus said in Matthew 23, actually verses 34 through 36, Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes.

Some of them you'll kill and crucify. Some of them you'll discourage in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. That on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Barakai, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come on this generation. That is to say, that generation would experience the ultimate combined punishment for all the wicked bloodshed. Why? Because they killed Jesus.

And all the righteous bloodshed is summed up in his blood being shed. And this generation that killed him would also experience the judgment, accumulated judgment of wrath that God was storing up against the nation of Israel until this time and would experience his wrath. And they did in that generation.

Now, it's fairly easy to establish from the vast majority of these occasions that when Jesus said this generation, he meant the Jews living at his time who heard him and heard John the Baptist. So when he says this generation will not pass away until all these things be fulfilled, certainly if his usage of that expression earlier means anything, then we would expect him here to be saying that the people living in his time would not pass away until all these things come to pass. Now, the only thing that really presents a problem to that is the fact that before that prediction, we have verses 30 and 31, which talk about the coming of the Son of Man.

But is this really a problem? As I pointed out already more than once, Matthew 16, 28, Jesus said, some of you standing here will not taste death till you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. The very same prediction and the very same time frame. If we can allow that Jesus said the words in Matthew 16, 28, that some of you standing here will not taste death before you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

If we can allow that Jesus made that prediction, then there's no reason why he couldn't have made a prediction of his coming in verses 30 and 31 and later said this generation will not pass before all these things come to pass. It's essentially the same statement. It's essentially the same prediction.

Therefore, it's not questionable what Jesus meant when he said this generation will not pass. He said it in other unmistakable words in Matthew 16. Some of you standing here will not taste death.

How clear could it be? That generation, some of them won't die before this happens. The problem is in knowing what he meant about his coming, not about the generation. That's easy.

Really, when you compare all the data, that's kind of a no brainer. This generation means these people living now who won't taste death until this happens. Not all of them will.

But what's hard is to know what he meant by his coming. Because if he meant his second coming, then he missed it by a mile. If he meant that his second coming would happen in that generation, then he was way off.

Now, I believe in everything about Jesus that the Bible says about Jesus, including the fact that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, God in the flesh, the prophet like Moses and so forth. And therefore, believing those things, I cannot believe that he would miss a prediction. Because even an ordinary prophet can't do that.

Even an ordinary prophet gets all his predictions right or gets stoned in the Old Testament law. Jesus, the greatest of all the prophets, would not miss a prediction so wildly without proving himself a false prophet. Therefore, every evangelical who believes

that Jesus is who he said he is must believe that what Jesus said would happen in that generation did happen in that generation.

But that raises serious questions. What then do we make of verses 30 and 31? Well, that's a good question. Let's take a look at it and see what is predicted there and see what we should make of it.

It says in verse 29, I want to go back that far. Verse 29, 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.

Now, I want to tell you that I'm ambiguous in my own thinking, ambivalent is a better word, as to what the tribulation involves, what the extent of it is. I'm inclined to think that the tribulation is simply the three and a half years of the Jewish war from its beginning in mid 66 AD to its end near the end of 70 AD when Jerusalem fell. Three and a half years was this war.

And it ended up with the destruction of Jerusalem. This is history. Josephus records details.

It was bloody, ugly, horrendous. If we would just say there's never been an uglier situation in history, no one could prove us wrong. It's certainly horrendous.

Now, if that is the tribulation of which Jesus spoke, then why does it say immediately after the tribulation of those days, these things will happen? That would mean at the end of this three and a half year period. And I would in being, I'd say in 70 AD, which is at the end of that tribulation, these things would happen. But wait a minute, the sun and the moon darkened, stars falling from heaven, the powers of the heavens being shaken.

How are we to understand this? Well, interestingly, it can't be literal because stars do not fall to earth. They can't. One reason is they're bigger than the earth.

And it wouldn't, you could never have more than one star fall to the earth. Now it doesn't say they fall to the earth because they fall from heaven. So maybe we're talking about shooting stars.

But let me just suggest to you that if you're acquainted with the Old Testament, you will be aware that this language is commonly used in the Old Testament in a non-literal way. And the disciples being Jewish, being well-schooled in the Old Testament, would possibly understand Jesus' words the way that the prophets would have used the same expressions. Let me give you some examples here.

I have them in your notes, by the way, in the Olivet Discourse and Parallel Columns, the fourth column at the top says general observations. And there are 13 general observations. But if you look at number, observation number 11.

No, not that one. Let's see, which one? One of them I talk about the sun and moon being darkened. I thought it was number 11, but it's not.

It's going to get, okay, it's number 10. References to cosmic dissolution in the Olivet Discourse need not be literally pressed any more than the same imagery in. And I give several examples.

There are more examples than these that could be given, but I give several enough to make a point. Look over at Isaiah chapter 13. Isaiah chapter 13 begins in verse one, the burden against Babylon, which Isaiah, the son of Amoz saw.

This is the destruction of ancient Babylon, not future Babylon. In the same chapter in verse 17, he says, behold, I will stir up the Medes against them who will regard neither silver nor gold. Now the Medes and the Persians are the ones who overthrew ancient Babylon.

This is a prophecy made while before Babylon fell, predicting the fall of Babylon. But look in the midst of that prophecy, look at verse 10. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light.

The sun will be darkened and it's going forth and the moon will not cause its light to shine. Now, did this Babylon fell? Well, we don't know. I mean, I guess I don't think we have any recorded history of it, but I don't believe it's necessary to assume that it literally happened.

What is suggested here is that Babylon is like the sun or the moon or the stars in terms of its seeming permanence. But when it falls, it's as if the sun itself fails or the moon stops shining or the stars themselves stop shining something as as seemingly permanent and seemingly invincible as Babylon. Coming to an end, it's why it says if the stars themselves came to an end or the sun and the moon, those things which you think of as never coming to an end.

And this imagery is found elsewhere in the prophets as well. In Isaiah 34, Isaiah 34 and verse three, actually, verse four. I wrote the wrong verse in verse four, 34, 34 of Isaiah.

All the hosts of heaven, meaning the stars shall be dissolved and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll. All their hosts shall fall down as a leaf from the vine and as fruit falling from a fig tree. Go on.

For my sword shall be bathed in heaven. Indeed, it shall come down on Edom. Now, this is a prophecy about judgment on Edom.

Is this future? It can't be. Edom doesn't exist anymore. The nation of Edom as a race of people came to extinction in the first century A.D. It is said by scholars that the last known Edomite was Herod the Great.

And he was only half Edomite. The Edomite people had been extinct mostly for a generation or two before that. But Herod is the last known historic Edomite and he's dead and so are all his offspring.

There are no Edomites. There have been no Edomites for the past 2,000 years. The end of the world will not find any Edomites for God to judge because that line has been extinguished 20 centuries ago.

And yet, with reference to God's sword coming down in judgment on Edom, very figurative language, it says, the host of heaven shall be dissolved, the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll, their hosts, meaning the stars, shall fall down as a leaf from a vine. Like leaves from a vine or a fig tree or whatever. Now, in other words, the fall of a nation of long duration like Edom is like the end of the heavens themselves, at least to the Edomites.

It's like the end of the world. It's like God's putting their lights out, you know? I mean, it's really like something of permanence that no one thought would ever come to an end. Now it comes to an end when God judges it.

It's like the heavens themselves being rolled up and put away. This imagery is common in the Old Testament prophets. Look at Ezekiel chapter 32.

Ezekiel 32 is a judgment on Egypt and on Pharaoh. In Ezekiel 32, we have the very same imagery with reference to Egypt. And Egypt was conquered by Babylon after this prediction was made.

But I'd like to, let's see, start reading. We'll look at verse 1. It came to pass in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and say to him. Then it goes on and gives a lengthy prophecy about what's going to happen to Egypt.

And it was fulfilled when the Babylonians conquered Egypt. But look at verses 7 and 8. When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens and make its stars dark. I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon shall not give her light.

All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you and bring darkness upon your land, says the Lord God. Now, this is not the actual destruction of the sun, moon, and stars. It's just that to Egypt, it's the end of the universe.

It's the end of their history. It's God has put out the sun, moon, and stars as far as all the bright lights of heaven. God put them out as far as Egypt is concerned.

Again, it's not literal. It is figurative. It relates to the fall of a great and long-standing nation.

It's as if the heavens were dissolved and the sun, moon, dark, and all that stuff. Now, I won't turn you to the book of Joel, but there's... Well, maybe I should. I should turn you to the book of Joel.

In the book of Joel, there are many references to it, giving the sun, moon, darkening, and so forth. I don't want to look at all of them. But in my understanding, the book of Joel is about a prophecy against Jerusalem.

I do not know whether all of it is about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. I know that part of it is. Some of it may also have applied to a judgment earlier in Israel's history.

But in Joel chapter 2, you may recognize some of these verses. If we start reading at verse 28, it says, It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on my men's servants, on my maid's servants, I'll pour out of my spirit in those days.

Recognize that? Peter quoted that on the day of Pentecost, said this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. But Peter kept quoting. He quoted the passage all the way through part of verse 32.

No, actually through 31. 30 and 31. I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth and blood and fire and pillars of smoke.

The sun shall be turned to darkness, the moon into blood before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. I'm going to argue that the great and terrible day of the Lord happened in 70 AD. It was a great and terrible day.

The day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment on Jerusalem. Now, Peter quoted those verses and said they were living in that time. That the fulfillment of these verses was in progress.

The Holy Spirit had been poured out on Jerusalem and shortly after that, there was going to be blood, fire, pillars of smoke, all of which characterized the war of the Jews and the great day of the Lord on Jerusalem occurred and with the darkening of the sky and so forth. Let me show you something on the chart that I've given you with the several columns. If you would notice in Luke 21, verse 25, with reference to the fall of Jerusalem.

Now, we know it's with reference to the fall of Jerusalem because in that chapter, Luke 21, verses 20 through 24, we've already looked at has to do with the Romans coming against Jerusalem. Verse 25, the next verse says, and there will be signs in the sun, in the moon and in the stars and on the earth, distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth for the powers of heaven will be shaken. That's obviously parallel to the statements of Matthew 24 that we're talking about the sun, the

moon being darkened, verse 29.

Now, were there signs in the heavens associated with the fall of Jerusalem? What's interesting is that Josephus was not a Christian, had never read the gospels, was probably not even aware that Jesus had ever made this sermon ever. He was not in Christian circles, reading Christian literature. He was a Jew who witnessed the fall of Jerusalem.

He was a participant in it. He was a captain in the Jewish army and he defected to the Roman side when he saw that the Jews could not possibly win. And he spent the rest of his career in the army trying to persuade the people in Jerusalem to surrender.

And when Jerusalem fell, Josephus went back to Rome with Titus and became the official historian of the Jewish people that the Romans hired him to be. Now, he was not a Christian. As far as we know, he never read any Christian literature.

He made some references to Christ in his writings, but not such references as would indicate that he was very acquainted with the details of the life of Christ or that he was devoted to Christ in any sense. Now, in his book, *The Wars of the Jews*, where he retells the story in great vivid detail of the fall of Rome and of the things that precipitated it during the Jewish war, there's an interesting passage I'd like to read to you. It's kind of a lengthy paragraph, but I think you'll find it interesting.

It's in *The Wars of the Jews*, one of Josephus' books, Book 6, Chapter 5, Paragraph 3. If you want to write that down, you'd call it *Wars*. That's the abbreviation of this book, Josephus' *Wars*. Then you'd have 6, 5, 3. That's how you would cite a passage from Josephus, 6, 5, 3. You can look this up.

His works are available. I have a copy of them in my car. I've Xeroxed this particular copy.

Here's what Josephus said, and this was about the Jewish war and things happening at that time. He says, thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers and such as belied God himself, while they did not attend nor give credit to the signs that were so evident and did so plainly foretell their future desolation. But like men infatuated without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them.

Thus, there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet that continued a whole year. Thus also, before the Jews' rebellion and before those commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the eighth day of the month of Zanthikos, and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone around the altar and the holy house that it appeared to be bright daytime, which light lasted for half an hour. This light seemed to

be a good sign to the unskilled, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes as to portend those events that followed immediately upon it.

At the same festival also, a heifer cow, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple. Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner court of the temple, which was of brass and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night. Now those that kept the watch in the temple came hereupon, running to the captain of the temple, and told him of it, who then came up thither, and not without great difficulty was able to shut the gate again.

This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open to them the gate of happiness, but the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies. So these publicly declared that this signal foreshadowed the desolation that was coming upon them. Besides these, a few days after the feast, on the twenty-first day of the month of Artemisius, a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared.

I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those who saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals. For before sun setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds and surrounding of cities. Moreover, at the feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner court of the temple, as their custom was to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that in the first place they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude saying, Let us remove hence.

Then it goes on and on. Now these are the principal signs that Josephus records. Now he is not in any sense aware of Jesus' statements, he's not aware of the book of Revelation.

He is a non-Christian living at the time, a witness of these things, and he bears witness that these things, could some of these things be called signs in the heavens? A star looking like a sword hanging over the city, a comet that remained a year in the sky visible, a great light at midnight around the altar that was as bright as daylight for a half hour, armies in armor seen running among the clouds over the city. Now some might say, Well, Josephus, maybe he just exaggerated a little bit. Well, I don't know.

How can we be sure? Jesus said there'd be signs in the heavens. Why should we doubt Josephus, who did not consciously intend to fulfill what Jesus said? He was just writing what he saw and what was told him by people who saw these things. Now you can be doubtful that those things happened, but there's no more reason to doubt Josephus on

this than there is to doubt that these things could ever happen in the future.

If such things are predicted by Jesus to happen, why couldn't they have happened in the very generation he said they would happen in? And isn't it interesting that although very few books as old as the New Testament have survived, besides the New Testament, Josephus has. It almost seems that God, to my mind, it seems as though God may have preserved the works of Josephus just so we would have the historical fulfillment of these things, because the Bible itself does not record the fulfillment. The Bible only records the prediction.

Now what I want to say, let's get back to Matthew 24 here. When Jesus said immediately after the tribulation of those days, if he means the Jewish war, as seems from the context to be the case, he says the sun will be dark and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from heaven, the powers of the heavens will be shaken. This language, as I say, does not have to be literal any more than it does in Isaiah or Ezekiel or Joel when it talks about the fall of Babylon, the fall of Edom, the fall of Egypt, or the fall of Jerusalem in the case of Joel.

In other words, this is typical prophetic language. The prophets have done this before. We're not in unfamiliar territory here.

Jesus is a Jewish prophet. He speaks like a Jewish prophet. His disciples are acquainted with the Jewish prophets.

He speaks of a great cataclysm, which he speaks of it as if it's the dissolution of the universe itself. But such language before simply meant the fall of a great empire, the fall of a great city like Babylon, and the fall of Jerusalem would certainly warrant such language. God's holy city at one time now become a den of thieves.

To use such language as the prophets used of cities of less importance than this in their fall to apply such language to the fall of Jerusalem is not outrageous to suggest that Jesus did. It might be strange to our ears, but we have to remember Jesus didn't write this to Americans. He wrote it to Jews, and Jews had certain established idioms that they were familiar with from their prophets.

If Christians were more familiar than they are with the Old Testament prophets, they would make fewer mistakes as to the meaning of Jesus' words in many cases, because he used the same established language of the Old Testament. Now, what about verse 30, Matthew 24, 30? Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. The word order here in the New King James is not the only possible word order.

In the King James, the same sentence is this way. Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. Now, that has different implications than the way it reads in the New King James, because in the New King James, it sounds like the sign appears actually in

heaven.

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, as if the sign will appear in heaven. But actually, a possible reading of the same words in the way the King James read it was, then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And some scholars believe that the sign was not in heaven, but it was an earthly sign that the Son of Man was in heaven.

Let me turn your attention to what Jesus said to Caiaphas in the Sanhedrin in Matthew 26. In Matthew 26, and beginning at verse 63, Jesus was on trial before the Sanhedrin. And it says, Jesus kept silent.

And the high priest answered and said to him, I adjure you by the living God that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Verse 64, Jesus answered him, it is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Now, when did Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin see this? Well, I don't know. We don't have any record of them having a vision like this. They might have.

Certainly, they're not alive now, so he's not talking about the second coming of Christ, unless he's suggesting that these men will be resurrected prior to the second coming of Christ, so they can see him coming. But that is not a likely meaning. Certainly, when he says to a group of living men, you will see a certain thing, the most natural way to understand it is that it will happen in their lifetime.

And what they will see is the Son of Man in heaven coming on clouds and so forth. Now, this language, does this require, and would they understand him to mean that they will actually see him in the sky? Well, we might think so, because that's the way we would mean it if we in America wrote such words. But how would the Jews understand it? Let me show you something in Isaiah 19.

Sorry to keep your fingers so busy, but to understand any scripture, it's good to compare scripture with scripture, something that if more people did, they would get fewer wrong impressions of what is meant. In Isaiah 19, verse 1, it says the burden against Egypt. Now, virtually all scholars feel that Isaiah 19 is a prophecy about the destruction of Egypt by Assyria, which occurred like 700 years before Christ.

In the burden against it, in the figurative language of prophecy, it says in verse 1, Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and will come into Egypt. The idols of Egypt will totter at his presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst. None of that is literal language.

Hearts don't melt. The idols do not tremble in fear. But that's what is predicted.

It's figurative language. The prophets always use figurative language. It's poetic.

But what does it mean? How is it said? What it means is a judgment from the Lord is coming on Egypt. As it turns out, this judgment was realized through armies coming and destroying and conquering Egypt. They were Assyrian armies.

But how does the prophet symbolically refer to it? Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and will come into Egypt. Did God visibly come to Egypt? Did God really ride on a cloud? Well, not exactly. The language is based upon the fact that earlier scripture said that God rides the clouds like a charioteer rides a chariot.

A chariot is a war vehicle to the Jew. It's not a recreational vehicle. It's not a utility vehicle, but it's a war vehicle.

And in Psalm 104, verse 3, Psalm 104, verse 3 says, He lays the beams of his upper chambers in the waters, who makes the clouds his chariot, who walks on the wings of the wind. See, the psalmist said that God makes the clouds his chariot. A chariot is a war vehicle.

When God judges a nation and sends armies against the nation, it's as if God were riding at the head of those armies, even if they're pagans, because they are doing his bidding. Maybe inadvertently they're doing it, but they are doing it. And it's as if God is himself riding his war chariot against a nation, his chariots of clouds.

So we find God riding on a swift cloud coming to Egypt, but literally or figuratively? Well, not literally. And yet what is the difference between the language there of Isaiah 19, 1 and the language of Jesus in Matthew 24? He says at the end of verse 30, they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. They'll see the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.

The Son of Man is in heaven. The Son of Man is glorified. He is ruling.

And the sign that he is doing so is the destruction of his enemies who have crucified him, his vindication. The destruction of Jerusalem is the sign on earth that the Son of Man is in fact exalted and vindicated in heaven. That is how at least some understand these words.

You don't have to. You might say, that's too far-fetched for me. And I say, go ahead.

It doesn't matter. It won't hurt you. It won't hurt you to believe whatever you want to believe on this probably.

But I'm saying there is reason to suggest, since Jesus said all these things have happened in this generation, that the things he's describing did happen in that generation. Now, but there's a problem here. Verse 30 says, all the tribes of the earth

will mourn.

Doesn't that sound like it's got to be the second coming because everyone in the whole planet, all the tribes of the earth will mourn? Well, remember what I said to you about the word earth in the Greek, *ge*, it means earth or land, either one. They are equally good translations of the same Greek word, earth or land. What if it was translated, the tribes of the land will mourn? If that were the meaning, then it would mean, of course, this is something that happens to Israel.

Now, let me ask you, what sounds more biblical, the expression tribes of the earth or tribes of the land? Well, it depends on how much you've read the Bible. You know, the earth is not divided into tribes. It's divided into what? Nations.

Generally, all the nations of the world, all the nations of the earth, the division of the earth's people is into nations. But what typically in scripture is divided into tribes? It's not a trick question. Well, the land of Israel, particularly the 12 tribes of Israel, Israel is a cluster of tribes, 12 of them.

Therefore, to say all the tribes of the fill in the blank, either earth or land, land is more likely. The tribes of the land of Israel, the land of Israel is divided into tribal portions from the days of Joshua on. The earth is not divided into tribes.

Therefore, I'm going to suggest that what Jesus said in the way it should be translated is not all the tribes of the earth, but all the tribes of the land will mourn. Did that happen in 70 D? Boy, you sure did. Israel, all Israel was afflicted and has been afflicted ever since by that.

The destruction of Jerusalem was an occasion of mourning for all the tribes of the land. But what about verse 31? Here's a bit of a problem, or is it? It says, 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. Now, many have understood this to be the rapture or those who believe in a preacher.

They sure have taken this to be a gathering of the tribulation saints out of the earth at the second coming. Both of those views have one thing in common. They both think that the gathering of the elect is out of the world into heaven.

That's not necessarily what it says. Maybe the reason they think so is because of the mention of angels. He'll send his angels.

But those of you who've been taking a Greek class here on Monday nights know that on Galileo is plural for on Galas and that on Galas means what anybody messengers. It is frequently in the Bible used of supernatural heavenly beings that we call angels. It is also repeatedly used in scripture of people who are not angels, but on Galileo can be people.

For example, we're told in Luke that John the Baptist sent on Galileo from prison to Jesus to ask him, are you the one who is to come? Well, everybody knows those messages were human, but the word on Galileo is used. You'll find it several times. If you would look it up in a Greek concordance, you'll find that the word on Galileo is used a number of times of human messengers.

Now, what if it meant that here the word does not necessarily have any indication that it means angels or messengers. Context alone decides what if we understood this to mean he will send out his messengers and they will gather together his elect from all the parts of the world. How would that be understood? Wouldn't that be a naturally understood to mean that the messengers, the evangelists of the gospel would be sent out to all the world to gather into the kingdom of God, into the church, all the elect from all the earth from one end of heaven to the other one end of heaven, meaning from one horizon to the other horizon of the earth from east to west.

The language certainly can bear that meaning. I again will not insist upon it, but it can certainly bear that meaning without any violence being done to it. In that case, what Jesus would be predicting here is simply the destruction of the Jewish state and of the temple and of its capital of a great grief coming upon the Jewish people, but of the messengers of the gospel to all the world bringing in the Gentiles.

This prediction would make good sense. Did it happen in that generation? It did. Now, I don't expect any of you to jump immediately over the line to my way of seeing this from wherever you might have been before.

I didn't. I was shown these cross references years ago, years in advance of my deciding that this was correct. I just was too hooked on my old interpretation.

For one thing, I didn't want to be a heretic, and secondly, I didn't want to appear to be a heretic even if I was right. I didn't want to take a view that was so controversial, but I will say that the more I've read the verses, the more I've compared scripture with scripture, the more I've seen and become acquainted with the language of the prophets and realize that Jesus used established figures of speech, the more, and read Josephus and so forth, the more I realized that, hey, what Jesus said would happen did happen. Now, there is an alternative here for you I'd like to suggest, and that is that one could speak of the great tribulation as being not just the Jewish war, but the whole troubles that came on the Jews beginning with the Jewish war and continuing even to this present day.

The Jews are still having trouble throughout all the world, and one could argue that the great tribulation, since Jesus didn't say how long it would be, he didn't say it would be seven years, he didn't say it would be three and a half years, he didn't say it would be a thousand, he didn't say how long it would be, he just said there would be great tribulation, but in the parallel in Luke 21, he said they would be led away into all lands and Jerusalem should be trampled by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are

fulfilled. His words in Luke 21 could be understood to mean that the distress that would come upon them in 70 A.D. would continue until the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled. That would extend the tribulation through the whole church age, the whole period of time that God's dealing with the Gentiles.

This would be more comfortable for many of you probably, because then in Matthew 24, 29, which says immediately after the tribulation of those days, that could be something still because that tribulation might still be happening for all we know, even now, and when that's done, then we have the second coming of Christ and you could then retain a more literal approach to verses 29 through 31 and take that to mean the second coming of Christ. Many people would feel more comfortable doing this and I will allow that that's a possibility. The only problem with it that I know is verse 34, which says, Assuredly, I say to you, this generation shall by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled.

But I could allow, I mean, not that you have to worry about what I would allow, but I'm telling you what, my own thinking would allow this, that when he said all these things be fulfilled, it could mean the overwhelming majority of the things he's spoken of, but maybe not every last one. That is to say, all with the exception of this one thing. Because we know that the word all in scripture is sometimes used as a hyperbole, it is sometimes used to mean the sweeping, overwhelming majority of things and not every last one of them.

If that is so, if all these things in verse 34 is really a hyperbole, then one could argue, well, all this stuff up to verse 28 will be fulfilled in that generation. But verse 29 through 31 will be fulfilled at a later time, not in that generation, in that his comment in verse 34 does not, and is not meant to include those events of the second coming of Christ. So I leave you with two credible options.

One is to do what most of us have always done. Consider that verses 29 to 31 are in fact the second coming of Christ, still future. To do so, one has to make the tribulation last from 70 AD until whenever Jesus comes back, because verse 29 says immediately after the tribulation.

The word immediately is the problem here. You've got to have the tribulation ending just before the events there in 29 through 31. But if the tribulation is the whole church age, the whole age from the destruction of Jerusalem until the second coming of Christ, that certainly has been a time of tribulation on the Jews, then you can retain your favorite view on verses 29 through 31, perhaps.

In my opinion, that is not the best understanding of it because of the reasons I've mentioned, but I certainly would be glad to accommodate other possibilities. Now, I will say this very interestingly. In verse 33, Jesus said, so you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near at the very doors.

When you see these things, know that it, what? It. Some manuscripts say he is near. Either the Lord is coming or it, the event that the disciples asked about.

Remember they said, what shall the sign be that these things are about to happen? Meaning the fall of Jerusalem. He said, well, when you see all these things, you know that it is near. It's at the door.

What I'd like to turn your attention to is James chapter five for a moment here. We don't know for sure when James was written, but it was almost certainly written before 70 AD. In fact, I would say it certainly was written before 70 AD.

And yet there's a number of references to the coming of the Lord in James chapter five, as if that's almost immediate. For example, look at James five, verse three, rebuking the rich men. He says, your gold and your silver are corroded and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

You have heaped up treasure in the last days. They are living in the last days and they've heaped up treasure in the last days. Now look at verses eight and nine to the, to the Christians.

You also be patient, establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand, at hand. That means near. Look at verse nine.

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the judge is standing at the door. Now, where did he get that expression? The judge is standing at the door.

I would argue that he got that expression from Matthew 24, when Jesus said, so when you see all these things, know that it or he is near at the very door. James is saying to his readers, it is at the door. The judge is at the door.

He is at the door. Now Jesus had said something. The judge was going to be at the door.

The judgment was coming and you would know when it was right at the door. When you see these things, James apparently believed that he was seeing all these things. And he obviously was interpreted when he said the coming of the Lord draws near and the judges at the door.

It sounds like he's referring to Matthew 24 verses 30 through 33. The coming of the Lord is at the door when you see these things. Now let me just say this.

Yeah. Well, no one knows exactly when James wrote it, but he wrote it before 70 AD. I mean, it is considered to be one of the earliest books in the New Testament by most, most conservative scholars believe that it was one of the earliest books in the New Testament and most of the New Testament, probably all of it was written before 70 AD.

Uh, there's only a few books of the, of the New Testament that may have been written after 70 AD and that would be the books that John wrote. But, uh, there are scholars who believe that the entire New Testament was written before 70 AD. Um, but we can't prove, but we can say this, that James said the coming of the Lord was near and at the door.

He used the very language Jesus used. Now, let me say this. If James was wrong, then his book doesn't belong in our Bible.

If James was right, then he's saying that what Jesus predicted as near was near. Now, some Christians might say, well near, you know, that's like a date of the Lord. It's like a thousand years.

So even though James was a couple thousand years off yet, it was near as far as God is concerned. And it was at the door. But my statement in response to that would be, well, if at the door can mean 2000 years off, what was the use of Jesus even using the expression? Why would you say to his disciples, listen, when you see these things, no, it's near it's at the door.

But if at the door could mean 2000 years off, he might as well have said nothing because he communicated nothing. Usually when you say something is near, you are communicating an idea that it will not be very long till it's arrived. If it is in fact going to be a very long time, you might as well have said nothing because you've either miscommunicated or communicated nothing.

Jesus was trying to answer the disciples question. He said, you will see this. You will see that you will see this.

Verse 33, when you, who was he talking to? Four men living at that time. When you see all these things, then you know that it is at the door. And James, a different James, not the James who was listening to these words, but one who was contemporary with him said to his readers, it's near it's at the door.

Now I realized that these, a lot of these verses are favorite verses about the second coming of Christ. I'm simply saying a Bible study can be hard on the emotions because favorite holy cows, hobby horses, and so forth often have to bite the dust and be sacrificed to the truth when we compare scripture to scripture. The hardest part of this is not so much, I mean, I can imagine people have two ways to find this hard.

One is just the emotional release of things that we've held onto and said, oh, this is our own time we're living in. We're talking about these times. Jesus was predicting the days we're in.

We're in the last generation. I mean, there's a certain excitement about thinking that there's a certain sense of urgency about that. There's a certain sense of feeling

significant that we are in the final generation.

And of course, it gives us the hope that maybe we'll be raptured and we'll be that only generation that never dies. Well, wouldn't that be fun? We like that idea. Now, let me just say this, all the things I've said notwithstanding, we still might be the generation to see Jesus come back.

I'm in no position to say that that isn't the case. Jesus can come back whenever he wants to come back. And there will be some generation living at that time.

Maybe we're it. I don't know. So I'm not seeking to take away the blessed hope if you nourish such a hope that Jesus may come back in our lifetime.

But I will say this. This scripture does not give us any information on that subject, in my opinion. Because all of the things Jesus described as taking place in the Great Tribulation happened or at least began to happen in 70 AD and have they either ran their whole course by 70 AD or they've been running since then.

But they are not about some future seven-year tribulation. There's no way that an exegetical approach to this chapter can conclude that this is a prediction of a future seven-year tribulation. That requires the importation of that idea and the shoehorning of passages that don't say that into it unnaturally because of a paradigm that one has borrowed from somewhere else.

And I borrowed that paradigm for years and taught it that way until I began to get embarrassed because I realized I was having to argue against so many statements of Jesus. Because I had a certain idea Jesus meant certain things. Therefore, I couldn't take him at his word when he said this and this and this and this.

Because he obviously, if he said that meant that he couldn't mean what I believe he means. It's a hard thing being a Christian. Hard on the ego.

Hard on the emotions when you have to say, well, maybe I've been saying that Jesus meant something that he never intended to mean or say. So there is that thing that makes it hard to make any kind of a shift in your thinking on this chapter to the direction I'm suggesting. There is that emotional thing, that giving up of a treasured favorite idea.

But there's also another thing that makes it hard. And that is, as you sit here, some of you may be thinking, well, you know, maybe Steve's right. That could be right.

Maybe he's got that right. But they'll never accept that at my church. I'm not going to be a great commission school forever.

I have to go home. I'm going to have to face my church. And that is the big crisis, really, for many.

And rightly so. I understand that. And why do you think it's hard for me to find a church? I am actually a peacemaker on these things.

It doesn't bother me if people have a different opinion. But some people would be very bothered by my having a different opinion from them. And so I would just leave the ball in your court, leave you in a very uncomfortable situation.

You could remain unconvinced by what I've said and still believe that Matthew 24 is talking about a future tribulation. But your conscience will probably bother you eventually down the line, especially the more you read it with an open mind. And the other thing you can do is you could accept that this was fulfilled in the first century when Jesus said it would be fulfilled.

And then you can wrestle with your relationships with other Christians who might care more than they should as to what you think about it. There's always the possibility of being silent. There's always the Fifth Amendment.

People say, what do you think about the tribulation? I plead the Fifth. I refuse to answer on the grounds that it might incriminate me. I can't do that.

I'm on tape. But you can if you need to. But I just say this.

Do not allow the fear of man to decide for you. And I would suspect that where many of you are right now is partially convinced, but not entirely convinced. And that's fine.

That's where I remained for a long time myself. And from that point, you can go either way. You can go back to what you believed before or back forward to something else.

It doesn't matter. As long as you know there's two options and you can read these chapters with an open mind, realizing you don't have to impose false meanings on things and say that Jesus didn't mean what he said and so forth. You can read it for yourself.

And over the years to come, you can make up your own mind. And I'm in no hurry to lead you to my way of thinking. In fact, I would like very much if no one agreed with me, it would help them relate better with their churches, probably.

But at the same time, if we ask, does the Bible teach a future great tribulation? I would have to say not here, not in these passages. In fact, not in any passage. I can't tell you there won't be a future great tribulation, but I cannot tell you on biblical authority that there will be.

Because there does not appear to be any place in the scripture that predicts it. And maybe that's why Christians didn't know of such a doctrine until 1830. It took 1830 years of church history before someone came up with it.

Why? Because it wasn't there. It still isn't. He came up with it, but it's still not there.

And so this is obviously not the popular view, but it is nonetheless, I think, the biblical view. And a lot of times, the biblical view differs from the popular view among Christians on many subjects. Anyway, I leave to you these data to sort out and to hopefully reach your own conclusions in a time that is, as the Holy Spirit leads you, certainly feel free to disagree with my conclusions.

The Holy Spirit's more important than I am as someone to follow. All right, we'll close with that.