

HOSTILITY DURING THE PRE-ADVENT PERIOD

(A MATTHEW 24–25 SERIES)

PART 3

Introduction

Though other prophecies fill in greater detail to this sequential narrative of Jesus, Matthew 24 alerts us to what event-driven sequence He views as foundational to the apocalyptic end.

It is a time of urgency, excitement and anticipation when these unfolding prophecies are fulfilled. We **are** to sense deeply His expectant coming as they are fulfilled. That imperative: *“Lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh”* (Luke 21:28). But God also has ominous warnings for His people. It is the zenith of Satan’s hatred.

Thus – though our hope rises toward that glorious finale, these terminal periods of time will contain difficult *testing experiences*. Christ wants to see in His people an honest faith that can claim: *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39). They eternally represent Him! Their characters must be holy.

This is why the next few verses direct our thinking to question: “Am I really ready?”

Persecution and Martyrdom

“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake” (Matthew 24:9).

Persecution, hatred and even death must be endured in the last period before the eschaton.¹

“Then shall they deliver you up” (vs 9)

“Then” means the next sequenced event after the calamities have begun. “They” has no clear antecedent. It contextually suggests those who are being negatively affected by the calamities. The impact of the gospel message (vs 14) is ineffective in that group. God’s people are blamed in a similar fashion as were His priests during the draught in Elijah’s day.

“to be afflicted and kill you” (vs 9)

This time of tribulation is imbedded in many end-time Biblical discourses (II Thessalonians 2:3, I Timothy 4:1-3, II Timothy 3:12, II Peter 3:3, I John 2:18-19, Revelation 13:12-17). Amazing parallels are drawn from the advice Christ gave to His twelve disciples when they were sent out on their first missionary tour (Matthew 10:16-39).

¹ Hagner, Donald A.; *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson Reference & Electronic, Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers), 33B, p. 693.

“Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake ... fear not them which kill the body ... He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:22).

There, Jesus gave assuring promises:

1. The Holy Spirit would provide the words they were to say (Matthew 10:20; cf. Luke 21:14-15).
2. Don’t fear (Matthew 10:26-28), God even knows the number of your hairs. He knows what you are going through.
3. This can bring **us** hope as we soon will carry testing truths to the world.

This persecution will be a **testing experience** for each of His witnesses.

“ye shall be hated of all nations” (vs 9)

This, again, suggests that a causative blame is leveled at God’s remnant for the disasters. Since all nations are involved, the calamities are occurring on a global scale. Since the gospel is also going to all nations (vs 14) worldwide rejection and backlash is apparent. This witness is unique. It draws attention to a specific body of believers. The reaction to the message by the majority is negative and incendiary. Satan, however, is unable to block the conversion of a “great multitude” that John says is too large to number (Revelation 7:9).

Since severe persecution of God’s people is predicted, additional promises are made:

“But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

Luke’s review of the same material notes: *“They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake”* (Luke 21:12).

Most Christians today avoid studying about this persecution. But God gave amazing warnings that it was to be anticipated and fully understood. The experience of Daniel’s companions and the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:21-25) gives beautiful insight into a sequel of being faithful unto death.

*“Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, **Blessed be the God** of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God”* (Daniel 3:28-29).

Persecution provides an opportunity “for testimony.”² The heartache that this brings is not permissive vengeance by God. It is a witnessing tool that often is unparalleled in effectiveness.

² Bock, Darrell L.; *Luke* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), vol. 2, p. 1669.

Jesus provided a foundational prophecy regarding this time (Daniel 11–12):

1. It would last three and a half years (Daniel 12:7; cf. Revelation 11:2).
2. During this “appointed time” (Daniel 11:35) God’s people would be “instructing many” (Daniel 11:33).
3. It would be so effective that the antichrist would be “troubled” by what comes out of the symbolic witnessing “east” (Daniel 11:44).
4. God’s people would be specially blessed through waiting and enduring (Daniel 12:12).

“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

“He that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22b).

Another parallel involves the story of the red and pale horses of the second and fourth seals (Revelation 6:4, 7-8). Following the corrupt hatred of the apostate Christian world, many saints are martyred (6:9-11). But the promise is given: “white robes are given to every one of them” (Revelation 6:11). They are saved.

Defining More Clearly the Wicked

“And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another” (Matthew 24:10).

“Then shall many be offended” (vs 10)

The “then” (*tote*) suggests a distinct sequence. God’s people are witnessing, being persecuted with that hate-filled momentum spreading throughout the world. This becomes an immediate cause for many who claimed to be Christ’s to “stumble” or be “offended.”³ This prophecy was also given long ago by Daniel: *“Some of them of understanding [God’s people] shall fall”* (Daniel 11:35). That is why the promise is often given: “But he that endures ... will be saved.”

“Betrayal of one another” (vs 10)

This initially suggests another of the heartaches from the persecution. It echoes the words of Luke: *“And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death”* (Luke 21:16). “Commitment to Christ is a costly choice that could even split a family and nullify the ties of blood.”⁴

“shall hate one another” (vs 10)

The loyalty that the saints have for Christ eventually creates from the wicked a spirit of revenge that becomes global: *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake”* (Luke 21:17). Jesus counsels His people to have patience (Luke 21:19), and assures them that “not a hair of your head” will perish (Luke 21:18). This means that nothing will occur without it being within God’s will. Endurance leads to eternal life (cf. Mark 13:13b).

³ Nolland, John; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 965.

⁴ Bock, *op. cit.*, p. 1672.

Here in Matthew, the hatred and betrayal go even deeper. Another issue is also being portrayed. The wicked turn against each other.

This imagery is later embellished in the fifth trumpet (Revelation 9:1-11). The trumpets are numbered, and are thus sequenced. The first four represent the de-creation of planet earth in the first wave of God's desolating wrath. In the fifth trumpet Satan is permitted fury against planet earth for five months. He does have a major limitation: those with God's seal cannot be hurt during this time.

It is a period when Satan causes mental anguish among his own followers. They will want to commit suicide – but no deaths can occur (Revelation 9:6). Betrayal and hatred among Satan's followers will reach intense proportions. Probation's close and deliverance of God's people are in sight. This is when the wicked have King Satan controlling them (Revelation 9:11). The universe will fully see what his character is like – as he operates with few restraints.

“And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:11).

The danger of being misled recurs frequently throughout this discourse (24:4, 11, 24). Jesus previously warned against sign-working prophets (7:15, 22).⁵ This mirrors Paul's concern: *“Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders”* (II Thessalonians 2:9).

We must be fully alert to any influence that may distort truth, which could lead away from holiness, Jesus and the urgency that these eschatological messages are to bring. Falsehood would threaten the virtues of discipleship!⁶ Truth must be understood with the deepest clarity!

The basis for all this horror on mankind is now noted:

“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12).

The “iniquity abounding” means “lawlessness” or contempt for God's law, extinguishing love in man's heart. Sin becomes personified through hatred and bringing harm to others. The “flame of decency has gone out” – the heart has become cold.

A global moral crisis is being announced. The impaired love of “many” alludes to “all nations” in verse 9. The end is in sight.

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (II Timothy 3:13).

Expositor White observed:

“The very atmosphere is polluted with sin. Soon God's people will be tested by fiery trials, and the great proportion of those who now appear to be genuine and true will prove to be base metal. Instead of being strengthened and confirmed by opposition, threats, and abuse, they will cowardly take the side of the opposers. The promise is: ‘Them that honor Me I will honor.’”

⁵ Keener, Craig S.; *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 567.

⁶ Turner, David L.; *Matthew* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 574.

Shall we be less firmly attached to God's law because the world at large have attempted to make it void?

“When the religion of Christ is most held in contempt, when His law is most despised, then should our zeal be the warmest and our courage and firmness the most unflinching. To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few – this will be our test. At this time we must gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason. The nation will be on the side of the great rebel leader.”⁷

Within this apocalyptic narrative, Matthew records this promise:

“But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

This is an assurance that we have the possibility of reaching the end unscathed by the world's evil.

There are those who have difficulty in identifying with the “end” (*telos* – G) in this verse. This will shortly be defined as **when** the gospel has penetrated the world. It was also graphically described in Daniel 8 and 12 as **when** evil will reach its peak. The antichrist then comes to his end and God's people are delivered.

“Looking down through the ages to the close of time, Peter was inspired to outline conditions that would exist in the world just prior to the second coming of Christ. ‘There shall come in the last days scoffers,’ he wrote, ‘walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.’ But ‘when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them.’ 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Not all, however, would be ensnared by the enemy's devices. As the end of all things earthly should approach, there would be faithful ones able to discern the signs of the times. While a large number of professing believers would deny their faith by their works, there would be a remnant who would endure to the end.”⁸

A Sign – with Limitations

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14).

One of the queries the four disciples made of Jesus: What **“sign”** announces the **end** of the world? His answer relates to everyone on planet earth hearing the gospel invitation.

“When” (a timing statement) this “gospel of the kingdom” reaches the inhabited world (*oikoumene* – G), that end occurs. But Jesus **did not say** that it was an anticipatory sign!

The imagery of His kingdom had been previously developed. It is not of this world (John 18:36). It is to be established in us (Luke 17:21). Christ's words convey that the **point** in time **when** this work is complete, the end comes. All who will respond to the gospel invitation will have Christ in them (Colossians 1:27). Probation cannot close.

⁷ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 136.

⁸ White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 535-536.

This draws on the time when Michael will stand up (Daniel 12:1). His venue changes; a transition in history and Christ's work occurs. This echoes Jeremiah 8:20: *"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."* Man's last chance to repent has passed. Everything quickly moves towards His Advent.

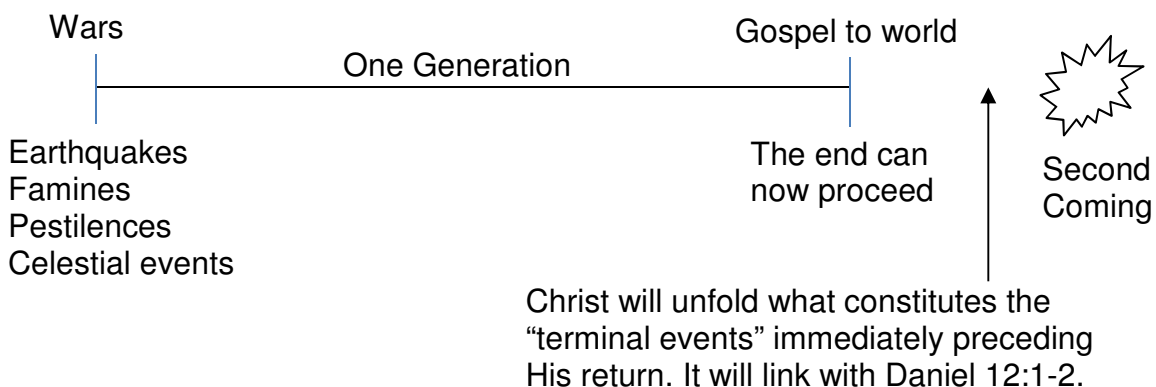
Intriguingly, thirty years after these words of Christ were spoken, Paul affirmed that the gospel had gone to all the world (Colossians 1:23; cf. Romans 1:8, 10;18; Colossians 1:5-6, 8-26). That was a literal fulfillment on a smaller scale, to be repeated at the Second Advent.⁹ Again, Jesus did not convey that this was a "sign" to man – only an end-associated event recognized by heaven (Revelation 14:15).

These prophecies have their greater or most important fulfillment at the end of the world. The future "end" is "preaching dependent" to all nations. The calamities heralded the "beginning" of the **end**. The penetration of the gospel throughout the world is a "prophetic termination" of the **end**. They **both** must complement each other at the Second Coming (*parousia*).

Jesus simply notes that the gospel penetration was associated with an end. For the Jewish people, their end occurred in 70 A.D., when Jesus predicted that no stone would be left upon another. The next few verses focus on that time. The global end would occur at the *parousia*, which Jesus soon specifically references (vs 21 on).

Jesus' claim in 24:14 does not imply that all peoples will be converted, but that the end will not come in its fullness until all have had the opportunity to embrace or reject Jesus.¹⁰

Highlighting, once again, the scope of Matthew's narrative, there is nothing intended that has predictive power. The spread of the gospel is only a statement of "universal mission" that must precede the Second Coming.¹¹



This "time" alludes to John's pre-Advent (Revelation 14) discourse: *"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people"* (Revelation 14:6).

Then a dimension is added, found nowhere else in Revelation. The message is linked with a judicial end. Don't delay to "fear God and give glory to him for the **hour** of His judgment has

⁹ White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 498.

¹⁰ Keener, *op. cit.*, p. 572.

¹¹ Nolland, *op. cit.*, p. 967.

come” (14:7). This references John’s invitation to measure the temple, the altar and the living worshipers (11:1). These all link together, revealing a sequenced period when God’s work will be finished (cf. Mark 13:10). Though discussed in another document, this parallels Revelation 4:1-2.

This final message is given in a “loud voice” (14:6). Everyone hears the cry and alludes to the success it will have when all will hear that final invitation and warning.

John the Baptist, at Christ’s first advent, said: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel”* (Mark 1:15).

For us today the warning will be given: the hour of judgment has come and the reaping is soon to occur (Revelation 14:15).¹² *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel”* (Mark 1:15).

What now will follow in our Matthew 24 study will be broken into two segments:

1. Verses 15-21 – alluding mainly to the fall of Jerusalem
2. Versus 21-28 (vs 21 overlapping) – alluding mainly to the pre-advent period.

The latter is embellished and reinforced by verses 29-31, which detail apocalyptic issues related to the Second Coming.

(to be continued)

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¹² Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 534-537.