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3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. 6 "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. 8 "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.

We approach Matthew 24 and 25, widely known as the Olivet discourse, with the utmost caution and trepidation. I believe much error and harm has been done by well meaning good folks who assign all kinds of meanings to these words of Jesus, that when they are not accomplished, cause the weak to stumble and doubt.

Who here has read the Late Great Planet Earth by Hal Lindsay? Or listened to the Left Behind series? How many of you have gazed at Clarence Larkin's charts. Every question answered. Great for visual learners.

I came of age with pre-millennial dispensationalists who are now the butt of rather unkind jokes and derision cast upon them by amillennial preterists. Don't worry, I'm going to define some terms as we work through some of the different ideas.

What I'm wary of are people who pigeonhole everything Jesus said and can give you dates. This means this and it happens after this. Rapture watch websites. The smoke out of the pit with women's faces are B24's that have the stinger in their tail. Updated to blackhawk helicopters

when the 24's were all sitting in Arizona.

One of the best and most valued friendships we ever enjoyed in Tonopah grew out of a discussion with a couple who were all spun up over a book called 88 Reasons Why the Rapture will be in 1988.

Bob and Marilyn Herschbach were packing their bags getting ready for departure. We shared some of the truths right here in Matthew 24 with them, and ultimately they became solid christian friends.

The basis for all of the bad math was begun also right here in Matthew 24. Israel is the fig tree. A generation in the Bible is 40 years. Israel in the land in 1948. 1988 is the year.

It gets to be like the voice in the Garmin satellite thing in the car when you passed up the road it thought you should take. "Recalculating" "Recalculating". The guy that wrote that book recalculated and decided on some day in 1989. Then Harold Camping comes along and spends a million dollars of other peoples money on billboards with the day.
Dooms day.

It all combines to make premillennial dispensationalism a laughing stock.

So what is a pre-millennial dispensationalist? What is a preterist? Let's start with preterist. The term preterism comes from the Latin praeter, which Webster's 1913 dictionary lists as a prefix denoting that something is "past" or "beyond". Past tense. Already happened.

Preterists are in the driver's seat these days because of the popularity of reformed theology with conservative deeper thinking christians in the last decade and a half or so. Some of my favorite teachers are preterist. It does not render them heretics.

Martin Luther and John Calvin never worried much about eschatology, the study of "future things". They worried about grace, and salvation. But they wrote entire Bible commentaries and in these areas of future things, I believe they got it wrong.

So, today, the new reformed movement almost worships these men and if they believed such and such about the future, it almost has the same weight and authority as innerrancy of the original autographs. They couldn't possibly have gotten it wrong! Oh? Really?? And that is the root of the modern preterist, replacement theology, amillennial movement. OK, some terms.

Preterists believe that Matthew 24 is 100% old news. Everything you see here, and in fact the entire book of Revelation, happened in 70AD. Thus the word preter which means past tense. Done. Over.

Israel is decimated. The church becomes the spiritual Israel and all of the promises are defaulted to her. Israel is kaput. This is what we mean when we say replacement theology. The church replaces Israel. God renigs on all of His promises to Israel and defaults them to the church instead.

So, then, Matthew 24 is simply describing the destruction of Jerusalem and the jewish system of religion in 70 AD. All the colorful language is hyperbole. The powers of the heavens shaking and the stars falling is what it seemed like to those folks who were getting the life crushed out of them.

So, that makes me odd man out. Because I am very much reformed in my theology, but I'm not a preterist.

On the other hand, C. I. Schofield and Clarence Larkin and others developed a school of thought roughly known as pre-millennial dispensationalism. And what that is in a nutshell is a rather strictly defined end times notion.

The dispensations are different ways that God has dealt with men in His ultimate plan of redemption. The patriarchs, like Noah and Job, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Then all of the promises to the chosen people, the jews. Dispensation of Law given by Moses. The Old Covenant.

Then the jews reject their messiah and the dispensation of the church age comes about and God blesses and gathers in the gentiles. That's the age we're in. But then things happen rather rapidly at the end of that dispensation.

The jews have 7 years of unfinished business on the books if the church dispensation began at the death of Jesus. Daniels 70 week prophecy. There's one week of years unused. And premillennial dispensationalists believe that week of jewish years is the tribulation period. Jacob's trouble.

In that 7 year period, Satan has free reign to destroy. Half the worlds population will perish. Half. At the end, Jesus returns and Satan is cast into a pit. Locked up for 1000 years. Satan deposed, the earth and the authority to reign on this earth is re-taken by it's rightful owner and creator, Jesus.

The next dispensation after the tribulation is the millennial kingdom. A 1000 year reign of Christ on earth on David's throne in Jerusalem, where the church joins with the jews in the blessings that God promised to His people the jews.

Then after that, a bit more trouble and finally a new heaven and new earth.

I'm cautiously on board with all of those ideas. So I suppose you could label me a pre-millennial dispensationalist. But a loose one. I get nervous anytime someone starts crunching numbers and figuring everything out. We've been wrong just about enough times now that I think it's time to lay off the numbers games. We've earned the sucker punches that the preterists are throwing at us.

Red "Danger" flags go up for me anytime someone reads the headlines and says, you see, another puzzle piece is in place. This means this. And that means that. And this is what Jeremiah was talking about here, and that is what Ezekiel was talking about in that chapter.

My own father-in-law was terrified by these folks who decided Hitler

was the antichrist and things were speeding to a final disposition. The end was imminent. It was difficult to talk with him about spiritual things after that experience left him scarred. Those folks were wrong, why would he believe I had it all figured out.

I'm a political junkie these days. For all of the reasons I've just downplayed. I believe the stage has never been set for final things more than now. A world gone mad as a matter. And every day seems to top the previous one. But I promise you, I'm not going to take any headline and tell you, this is the event Jesus was talking about in Matthew 24.

Premillennial dispensationalism is largely a product of the last 200 years. Or at least the preterists will argue this. It wasn't believed by the church through the ages.

I would argue that 2 ways. First would be what the angel said to Daniel. Seal this up Daniel. It is for the time of the end. I believe God put things in His book that He can reveal when they are needed. Progressive understanding. They've always been there, but no one needed to understand them until the time frame is upon us, and then lights begin to come on.

I don't expect Martin Luther and John Calvin to understand end times events. Their job was re-discovering salvation by grace plus nothing. They didn't need to understand nuances of future prophecy.

But as time gets closer to the end, it does not surprise me that the church is waking up to things that were always there, but not necessary.

And the other thing I would argue is that the early church adopted their Jewish eschatology, and if anyone cares to go that far back and study what the Jews believed, it lines up perfectly with the scorned premillennial dispensational view.

They read their old testament and got all the same stuff we get. The exception being they only see the messiah deliverer coming once. At the end of the age. They missed the double coming, once to take care of sin, and the next to depose Satan and bring in everlasting righteousness.

The did not see the mystery of the church age, God gathering in gentiles, for 2000 years.

It was revealing to me some years ago that a group of very isolated christians in Russia who never had the influence of reformation theology that the west inherited wanted John MacArthur to teach them about future things. And when he did, they all said, that's exactly what we believed just from reading and studying the scriptures. They wanted affirmation.

The reformed folk are almost arrogant about this. As though if you believe premillennial dispensationalism you're the unlearned, unwashed. Folks missing front teeth. Lower class. Unschooled. Billy Bob the Bible teacher. Beware of that. If we're unschooled, unwashed ignorant folk, we're in good company. So were the disciples. And the jews.

So let's begin like we have in the past by considering the words immediately previous to this which set the stage for the scene before us.

Mt. 23:37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38"Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39 "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

I believe the effect of these words on the disciples was almost traumatic. For Judas Iscariot this may have been the last straw. Let's try to put ourselves in their situation, their mindset, and I think it will make these verses come alive.

38"Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! What house? Look at vs. 1 of ch. 24 to find out. 1Jesus came out from the temple and was going away . . .

That house and everything it signified. Judaism and Israel were inextricably connected to this building. Their nation. Their religion.

Their identity. Their standing with God. Their well being. Their life is entangled with this place. It's who they are.

That makes the words . . . shocking. The Jews, the leaders of Israel I'm sure, were dismissive. This man from Galilee can't squash a bug in this temple. Words, dismissed. Rantings of a mad man whom they have already been plotting to eliminate.

But the disciples. Not so much. The disciples who believe in Him have learned that Jesus is somehow; God. And what He says, comes to pass. But still? The temple? Israel? Judaism? Their inheritance and life?

They have followed Jesus to Jerusalem because they were expecting the Kingdom reign of Jesus in Jerusalem to begin. Then. He would be the King and they would be the King's men. He would desolate Rome. Jerusalem would be the center of the universe. They were His men. That was the Kingdom. That's how the old testament pictured it right?

That hasn't happened and what has happened is that Jesus has broken off relations with the nation Israel, and worse yet, declared that the temple and all it represents, the nation and the religion, are finished.

And Jesus makes an exit. Just like the Glory of Israel did in Ezekiel 8 - 11. Ichabod. The glory has departed. And the disciples, I believe, are full of angst and foreboding. What in the world just happened??

They walk down into the Kidron valley and up onto the mount of Olives east of the temple and the view of the temple complex on the other side is, in a word, magnificent. It's like one of the seven wonders of the world in its gleaming magnificence. Overlaid in gold. The sun gleaming off of it.

Herod the Edomite king, wanted his name remembered and made the building project of this temple his masterpiece.

Looking back at that magnificent scene, and it's almost as if the confusion of what was just said needs to surface. What just happened Jesus? Look at this place. Desolate? Really? It's like they couldn't

process that information. How could their nation, their people, their religion based in this magnificent place . . . become desolate.

Mark says; *1As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"*

And Matthew records it this way; *1Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.*

As if to say, are you sure about this? This place? These buildings? Really? Is there any room to re-think this? They thought they were going to be tenants. Jesus turns His back to it and walks away, after declaring it a waste place. It's the elephant in the room. Somebody lets it out of the bag. *"Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"*

2And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

This place will be a waste land. Desolate. Uninhabitable. Crushed. Dismantled. Torn down. And the nation and culture and people, with it.

That's a lot to take in, standing there looking at sunbeams blinding you reflected from pure gold overlayment.

We have to laugh. Our politicians are always saying, let me be perfectly clear on this, and then they aren't. But Jesus, without a doubt, has made Himself crystal clear. What part of one stone not left upon another could you not understand.

Either it's true. Or He's a ranting mad man. Easy for us with 20-20 hindsight. God provided a blow by blow account left to us intact by the historian Josephus. We can read the history book and see it like a movie.

But what about these men. These would by earth shattering words. Nearly impossible to believe and digest. *behold what wonderful stones . . . not one stone here will be left upon another.*

3As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

OK, now then, we have to get ourselves in the mindset of the men asking the questions. Because we have 20 centuries of hindsight that have framed the question in our mind differently I think than what they're asking.

Israel desolate? Temple wasted? When then is the Kingdom. Everything revolves around the authority to reign of Jesus and we're going in the wrong direction. No Israel?? No temple?? How is this going to work then.

The word they use for coming is parousia and it has incorporated in it's meaning, an advent. A beginning. And they're talking about an age. When is this age of you not reigning and no kingdom going to depart, and when is the age of your kingdom, your reign on earth, going to come. We thought it was now. When will it be.

They can't see how it's going to work. No Israel. No temple. Jesus going away. How does this work? Because the prophets picture a King, on a throne, in Jerusalem. So how does no temple and no Israel add up to that?

That's their question. Help us out here because nothing is adding up.

Commentators make much out of there being 3 questions and 3 answers, and they do that for their own various purposes. Because they've got a pre-idea they want to get to, and they make it work for them. But that causes an immediate problem because Luke and Mark both tell this with 2 questions.

Luke; *"Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what*

will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

Mark; *Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?"*

I think it's helpful to condense it further because of their mindset. In view of their gleaming civilization before them; When?? and How?? How is this going to work. What's it going to look like.

And Jesus embarks on the longest dialogue in all of the Bible. If you have red letter bibles, this is the longest section of red letters. It is the final of 5 lengthy teaching sections of Jesus very words that Matthew records for us. It goes all the way to the end of chapter 25, and then we move into the crucifixion.

So try to get yourself into the mindset of these men. If not now, when?? And how? How do we get from a waste nation of Israel, to a glorious kingdom? How do we get from these beautiful stones, to a wasteland, and then a reign on Davids throne forever. In Jerusalem. Help us out here, because this really seems impossible. Hopeless. How are 12 hillbilly's going to make THAT happen!

And now I'm going to condense chapter 24 and 25 for you. Jesus spends 2 chapters saying; This isn't it. You'll see this, and that isn't it. Don't be confused if you see this, that's not it. Don't fall asleep waiting for it. Don't get sloppy because it isn't here yet. All these things that you're going to see, and we're going to read about in these chapters are NOT the kingdom.

When it does come; now they didn't have the science and information we have, but what he says here, is when it comes, you know how it's light on one side of the planet and dark on the other because there's only one directional source, the sun? Well, when I DO arrive, the whole place will have been dark because the lights in the sky went out, and the whole rock is going to be illuminated by a different source. The second coming, the parousia will be seen everywhere, at the same time.

All the rest of the stuff people are going to tell you, is bunk. That's a Jim condensation, but you're not getting off that easy. Let's get into it.

4And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 5"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. 6" You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 7" For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. 8" But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.

Here we have three areas. Three signs that point to the parousia. The coming Kingdom.

We can outline them. Deception and confusion that misleads many. Wars all over the place. Famines. Earthquakes and natural phenomena.

Now look with me at Revelation chapter 6. A familiar chapter. The first four seals unsealed. What we commonly refer to as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. The parallels are no accident. Rev. 6:1 - 8

1Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." 2 I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

The false messiah that conquers with a bow, but no arrows. This is the anti-christ. False messiah that does miracles and conquers and brings in a false peace through diplomacy. Most people will be convinced, this is the Christ. Exactly what Jesus warns of in Matthew 24.

3When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." 4And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

The false peace collapses and war ensues. Wars. Rumors of wars. Nation against nation. Jesus very words.

5When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. 6And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."

The fall-out of war and the collapse of nations is famine.

7When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." 8I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Famine follows war, and death follows famine and war. A quarter of the earth's population.

Back to Matthew 24. Jesus has them in the right order. But what is more chilling is He says, this isn't the parousia. Not yet. All these things are the birth pangs leading to the birth.

Birth pangs. Not normative for women, thank goodness, for most of their allotted time. But when they come, there is no mistaking them. Bam! I remember from an observation standpoint. I never once wanted to volunteer for the duty.

They start small. Manageable, sort of. But then a phenomenon we know and understand. They get closer together, and they grow in intensity.

Pam's boss at work is a most likeable fellow. He's very conservative in his politics and empathetic to christian folks. And every time there's a notable earthquake of tidal wave or some like disaster he looks at Pam

and says, something like, it's coming isn't it. The end times.

I never discourage those folks. I want them to think that way. Like the flood of people who came to church for a while after the 9-11 disaster. That's what they're supposed to do.

But as signs that have the common denominator of being like birth pangs, we've always had wars. We've always had earthquakes. We've always had disasters. We've always had famines.

When these things become birth pangs pointing to the birth, the parousia, the advent of the kingdom, they're going to be as notable to the ordinary occurrences as birth pangs are to ordinary daily aches and pains.

So let's look at these three things that Jesus says are NOT the parousia, but ARE pointers to it.

First is confusion. How interesting that in our day and time, the faith of Islam also has an eschatology. Their end time scenario is like a photo negative of ours. They have someone called the Mahdi who is a messiah like person who will come and either convert you to Islam or kill you.

And Jesus comes back from heaven and is the right hand man of the Mahdi. Jesus will do miracles and the whole world will be in love with Jesus and the Mahdi.

It gives a whole new meaning to the words of the real Jesus. *“See to it that no one misleads you. 5“For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many.*

There have always been false christs. But the final one may be a muslim who claims to be Jesus returned from heaven and who has the power to do miracles as part of the deception. Beware. Do not be deceived.

The second birth pang is murder. *6“You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must*

take place, but that is not yet the end. 7“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom

1/4 of the worlds population killed in blood letting. Chaos. There have always been wars but this is a new level when billions are being murdered. When it's one in four, there's no one to bury the corpses.

We've always had war. We've always had murder. Those are not birthpangs. What we're talking about here is a level no one has seen.

The third birthpang is natural phenomena on a scale never before seen. Earthquakes in various places. Luke mentions perplexity and terror at the roaring of the waves of the sea.

We've always had earthquakes. But the birthpangs ones will be set apart. Intense and often.

These things will come on the world like birth pains come on a woman. And the occurances will get closer together and grow in intensity as the time is near.

Everybody wants to know when the kingdom will come. We want to know the future. Those of us who love the King, long for this day. If we say the Lord's prayer daily, then every day we ask for this day. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, like it is in heaven.

The world is a disaster under Satan's authority. We long for the King of Kings. Did the words of this prophecy make it all clear for the hearers then? Listen to these same men in Acts 1:6,7 as Jesus is about to depart the earth, after His resurrection;

6 So when they came together, they asked Him, “Lord will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7Jesus replied, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority....

Matthew 24 was not given to let us know the times or the seasons. It is given to tell every generation of believers, no matter what happens, or where we are at in this schedule of events, you hang on to the end.

Faithfully carry out your ministry as slaves to your master, no matter what happens.

If somehow, tribulation saints are reading these words after the rapture of the church age, Do not be deceived. When Jesus comes, the whole earth, every tribe, will witness the event at the same time. All other claimants are false.