

# **God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #33 (Pt. 21)**

Matthew 24:29-31

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In the previous sermon, we considered one of the foundational passages (outside of the Book of Revelation) to which Full Preterists will turn in seeking to prop up their untenable and heretical position: namely, Matthew 24-25. You will recall that the Full Preterist interprets all of the events prophesied in Matthew 24-25 as fulfilled by the year 70 a.d. However, it was demonstrated that there are actually two distinct time periods (not just one as alleged by the Full Preterist) to which Christ directs His prophecy: (1) The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 a.d.; (2) The bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world. Most (if not all) Historicists will agree that these two events form the main prophecies of Christ in Matthew 24-25. The primary disagreement that one will find among Historicists (among whom I count myself as a Postmillennial Historicist) is precisely where to draw the line in Matthew 24 between what prophetically relates to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. and what prophetically relates to Christ's second coming at the end of the world. As I indicated in the previous sermon, some draw a solid line beginning with verse 29 ("Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" etc.), so that the verses prior to verse 29 prophesy events related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., and the verses beginning with verse 29 and following, prophesy events related to the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world. Others in the Historicist camp draw a solid line beginning with verse 36 ("But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels

of heaven, but my Father only” etc.), so that the verses prior to verse 36 prophesy events related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. (which would include today’s text in Matthew 24:29-31), and the verses beginning with verse 36 and following, prophesy events related to the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world. In the sermon this Lord’s Day, we shall (by God’s grace) be addressing that interpretive question.

In carefully examining the biblical arguments of Historicists who draw a solid line in one of these two places just mentioned in Matthew 24 (either before verse 29, or before verse 36), one will find sound interpreters from both sides of this question presenting strong arguments to support their position for where to draw that line. I believe that a merging (if you will) of the two positions actually brings us closest to the truth of the matter. In other words, rather than drawing a **solid line** or a high impenetrable wall (that strictly separates the prophesied events of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. from the second coming of Christ at the end of the world) beginning with verse 29 (which is the first position mentioned), or drawing a **solid line** or a high impenetrable wall (that strictly separates the prophesied events of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. from the second coming of Christ at the end of the world) beginning with verse 36 (which is the second position mentioned), I submit that a **broken line** be drawn (that allows continuity) beginning with verse 29, and a **broken line** be drawn (that allows continuity) beginning with verse 36, so that we understand that verses 29-31 have a relationship both to what goes before it (namely, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.) and also a relationship to what follows it (namely, the bodily, visible second coming of the Lord at the end of the world).

In so doing, I submit that verses 29-31 prophetically relate in a **primary sense** to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., but prophetically relate in an **ultimate sense** to the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world. Or another way of saying the same thing, Matthew 24:29-31 (as related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.) also bears a **typological relationship** to the ultimate fulfillment of these events at the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world. Thus, I submit that the interpretive solution to verses 29-31 is not an **either/or** solution (i.e. verses 29-31 **either** prophesy events related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. exclusively, **or** to the second coming of Christ at the end of the world exclusively), but rather I submit that the interpretive key that unlocks the door to accurately understanding Matthew 24:29-31 is a **both/and** solution (i.e. verses 29-31 **both** prophesy events related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., **and** to events related to the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world). This is not a novel view, but one embraced by other Postmillennial Historicists as well (as we shall see).

Let us now consider the main points for the sermon this Lord's Day: (1) An Important Interpretive Principle Examined; (2) The Application Of That Interpretive Principle to Matthew 24:29-31.

## **I. An Important Interpretive Principle Examined.**

A. That important interpretive principle relates to types (i.e. is biblical typology). What is a scriptural type?

1. First, a scriptural type is an outward representation of a greater more significant truth. For example, Adam is a type of Christ in that Adam points to one (namely, Christ) who stood as a greater covenant head for man. Adam as the first man failed to keep the

Covenant of Works and in so doing plunged not only himself but all his posterity by ordinary generation into sin and death. Christ as the second man (1 Corinthians 15:47) and as the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) fulfilled all righteousness as the covenant head for His elect posterity which the first Adam failed to do for his posterity, and Christ saves His elect posterity by means of the Covenant of Grace.

2. Secondly, a scriptural type is always predictive of a greater more significant truth, and therefore more fully realized in the future. For example, the sacrifices of the Old Testament were typical (and therefore pointed in the future) to the one final sacrifice of Jesus Christ which ended all such Old Testament sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1). The learned Patrick Fairbairn notes these very distinctive qualities about biblical types when he states, “Every type was, so far, **a prophecy**, that **under the form of sensible things**, and by means of present outward relations, it gave a promise of other things **yet to come**, corresponding in design, **but higher and better in kind**” (*The Interpretation Of Prophecy*, Patrick Fairbairn, Banner of Truth Trust, p. 93, emphases added).

3. Scriptural types may be found in **persons** (e.g. David is a type of Christ, the greater David), in **places** (e.g. the Land of Canaan is a type of heaven), in **things** (e.g. the temple is a type of the Church of Jesus Christ), and in **events** (e.g. historical judgments in the Old Testament that are called “the day of the Lord” are types of the final and ultimate “day of the Lord” when the Lord Jesus Christ will come again bodily and visibly to bless His people and to judge the wicked).

4. Turn with me to two historical judgments upon nations in the Old Testament (from a number that might be chosen) that are identified as “the day of the Lord”, and yet I submit that each prophesied “day of the Lord” that had a near fulfillment in the Old Testament pointed typologically to a greater fulfillment of “the day of the Lord” at

the Last Day when Christ will come again bodily and visibly to bless His people and to judge His enemies.

a. Isaiah 13:6,9, but this “day of the Lord” refers to the judgment that God brought against Babylon by means of the armies of the Medes as we see in verses 17-19.

b. Ezekiel 30:3, but this “day of the Lord” refers to the judgment that God brought against Egypt and other nations by means of the armies of Babylon as we see in verse 10.

c. Now note that “the day of the Lord” ultimately points to a universal judgment at Christ’s sudden coming at the end of the world when He shall come as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). Thus, by this brief study, we learn that prophesied events that were to be fulfilled in the near future may yet be typological of a greater and ultimate fulfillment in the distant future. And likewise, when we understand and apply this interpretive key of typological events to prophesied events in Matthew 24:29-31, I submit we find that there was a near typological fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. that pointed to a greater, more glorious, ultimate fulfillment at the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world.

B. As I stated earlier, various Postmillennial Historicists have likewise understood Christ’s prophecy in Matthew 24:29-31 as typologically fulfilled in the non-bodily coming of Christ to bring judgment upon Jerusalem in 70 a.d., but ultimately fulfilled in the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world. I cite the following three eminent Postmillennial Historicists as representative of others who hold the same position.

1. George Faber was author of *Dissertation on the Prophecies, That Have Been Fulfilled* [1811], and *The Sacred Calendar of Prophecy* [1828]. Mr. Faber is quite clear on the typological fulfillment of

these prophecies of Christ pointing to an ultimate fulfillment at the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world.

In short, the literal future judgment both of the quick and of the dead, and the literal second advent of Christ with the clouds of heaven, are poetically, though appropriately, **used as a type**, or symbol, or hieroglyphic, of *any* eminent judgment inflicted here below upon *any* impious nation or community, through the instrumentality of those secondary causes which God may be pleased to call into effective action (*The Sacred Calendar of Scripture*, 1:225-227,, emphases added).

2. David Brown was author of *Christ's Second Coming, Will It Be Premillennial?* [1849]. Mr. Brown likewise defends this view in the following words.

That these words (Matthew 24:29-31—GLP) point **ultimately** to the personal advent of Christ and the final judgment, I have not the least doubt. . . . But the first question ought to be, What is **the direct and primary sense** of the prophecy? Those who have not directed their attention to prophetic language will be startled if I answer, The coming of the Lord here announced is his *coming in judgment against Jerusalem*. . . . (*Christ's Second Coming, Will It Be Premillennial?*, p. 463, emphases added).

3. Patrick Fairbairn was author of *The Interpretation of Prophecy* [1865]. Mr. Fairbairn uses very strong language for the typological fulfillment of these prophecies of Christ in pointing ultimately to the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world.

And in Matthew 24, it is **impossible** altogether to separate between the immediate [non-bodily coming of Christ in judgment upon Jerusalem—GLP] and the final coming [the bodily coming of Christ at the end of the world—GLP]. To a certain extent, the two are intermingled together, **and the one is contemplated as the type and presage of the other** (*The Interpretation of Prophecy*, p. 454, emphases added).

C. Now having demonstrated from God's Word that the Holy Spirit has given us the interpretive key of typological prophecy and fulfillment and having given the testimony of some notable and representative Postmillennial Historicists who likewise maintain the same interpretive

key in understanding Matthew 24:29-31, let us now consider briefly our text seeking to apply this interpretive key of typological prophecy and fulfillment to Christ's words.

## II. The Application Of That Interpretive Principle To Matthew 24:29-31.

A. Let us first examine the contextual reasons for connecting these verses in Matthew 24:29-31 with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.

1. The first contextual reason is that Matthew 24:29 begins with these words, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days. . . ." a. Does anything that the Lord has already said help us to understand what He means by "the tribulation of those days"? Yes, indeed, for in Matthew 24:21 we find these words: "For then shall be great **tribulation**" (i.e. great tribulation upon the Jews, particularly those besieged in Jerusalem before 70 a.d., which is why the Lord warns His disciples to flee Jerusalem and Judea and find safety in the surrounding mountains in Matthew 24:16; cf. also Luke 21:20-24). Then notice what Christ says in Matthew 24:22: "And except **those days** should be shortened." What days? Well clearly the Lord means those days of great tribulation. Thus, when Christ declares, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days" (in Matthew 24:29), we have a firm contextual reason for taking the words of the Lord to refer to what he has just said about those days of tribulation that will come in judgment upon Jerusalem (and which came in the years immediately leading up to and including 70 a.d.), in as much as He has not mentioned any other days of tribulation in Matthew 24.

b. But also observe how the word "immediately" likewise connects verses 29-31 with what the Lord has just prophesied a

few verses before about the tribulation to fall upon Jerusalem in the years leading up to 70 a.d. If what is prophesied to occur in verses 29-31 is “immediately” to follow the tribulation upon Jerusalem, then there must be a contextual connection between verses 29-31 and the events that befell Jerusalem in the years leading up to and including the year 70 a.d.

2. The second contextual reason for connecting these verses in Matthew 24:29-31 with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. is evidenced from what Christ declares in Matthew 24:34: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”

a. The Lord says that all the events which He has prophesied up to that point in Matthew 24 will be fulfilled before the generation that was then living should die (in other words, within the ordinary life span of the apostles). It seems very arbitrary and unnecessary to make the words of the Lord here to mean, “This generation shall not pass, till MOST of these things be fulfilled.” For if there was a near typological fulfillment of verses 29-31 by the year 70 a.d., there is no reason to take lexical and contextual liberties with the words of our Lord.

b. And note that Christ states very specifically that it is “this generation” to which He is speaking that shall not pass away, till all these prophesied events prior to verse 34 be fulfilled. Again, we are not left to our vain imagination as to what Christ meant by “this generation”, for the immediate context likewise helps us understand these words. Turn with me to Matthew 23:36-38, where we once again find in the words of the Lord the key to understanding His words in Matthew 24:34. The judgment for all the righteous blood spilled by the Jews (particularly, the blood of Christ) would fall upon “this generation” says the Lord. And to confirm which generation He was speaking about, Christ goes on to prophesy the destruction to fall upon Jerusalem and the temple in



Matthew 23:37-38, which without controversy occurred in 70 a.d. Thus, once again, the context requires the words, “this generation” to mean the generation that was living at the time the Lord uttered these prophecies, which means that since verses 29-31 were to be fulfilled during the time of that generation that was then living when Christ uttered these prophecies, verses 29-31 are connected and fulfilled typologically in the events related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.

B. Having first examined the contextual reasons for connecting these verses in Matthew 24:29-31 with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., let us now briefly demonstrate how the words that Christ uses in Matthew 24:29-31 were typologically fulfilled in the events related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.

1. First, how were the words of Matthew 24:29 fulfilled typologically, when the Lord said, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken”?

a. When judgment falls upon a nation from God, the Lord uses such figurative language as we find in Matthew 24:29 to indicate that He is (as it were) turning off the lights of that nation.

b. Note a couple examples as representative of others one might find in Scripture: Isaiah 13:9-10,13 which speaks of God’s judgment upon Egypt by the Medes as we see in verses 17-19; and Ezekiel 32:7-8 which speaks of God’s judgment against ancient Egypt (Ezekiel 32:2) by the Babylonians (Ezekiel 32:11). Thus, just as the Holy Spirit used such poetic language to describe His judgment that fell upon nations in the Old Testament, so likewise, the Lord uses the same poetic

language to describe His judgment in turning off the national lights of Israel through the agency of the Roman armies.

2. Second, how were the words of Matthew 24:30 fulfilled typologically, when the Lord said, “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”?

a. The Scriptures use such language of God’s coming to earth in clouds even when that coming is a figurative, historical coming rather than the bodily, visible coming of the Lord.

b. Consider a few examples that are representative of others found in Scripture: **Deuteronomy 33:26-27; Psalm 18:6-11; Isaiah 19:1; Micah 1:2-5,16; Habakkuk 3:3-16** cf. Habakkuk 1:6. I likewise submit that the prophesied events of Matthew 24:29-31 had a typological fulfillment in the events related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.

c. The mourning of “the tribes of the earth” in Matthew 24:30 speaks of the sorrow of the twelve tribes of the land of Israel that will be experienced (for the same Greek word may be translated as either “earth” or “land”).

3. Third, how were the words of Matthew 24:31 fulfilled typologically, when the Lord said, “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, for one end of heaven to another.”

a. This verse has a typological fulfillment after the destruction of Jerusalem in the Lord sending forth his angels (or messengers, whether earthly angels or ministers as in Revelation 2-3, or heavenly angels or ministers who are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” Hebrews 1:14) to

gather in His elect into the Church from the four winds or four corners of the earth (Zechariah 2:6).

b. The “great sound of a trumpet” is used figuratively in Scripture to refer to the assembling of God’s people that are scattered abroad (Isaiah 27:13), and so it may likewise be used figuratively here in Matthew 24:31 to refer to the gathering of God’s elect into the Church of Christ by means of His messengers. Now once again, I submit that these prophesied events had a typological fulfillment in the near events related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.

c. We have noted how Matthew 24:29-31 is connected with the prophesied events related to the destruction of Jerusalem and is typologically fulfilled in the events leading up to the year 70 a.d., but now note how Matthew 24:29-31 is connected with the prophesied events related to the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world. The words of the Lord in Matthew 24:36 (“But of that day”) contextually reach back to Matthew 24:3 (the second question of the disciples related to Christ’s second coming at the end of the world) and also reach back to Matthew 24:30 (which though typologically fulfilled in 70 a.d. is ultimately fulfilled in the bodily, visible second coming of Christ at the end of the world). For we note the ultimate fulfillment of these typological prophecies in Matthew 24:29-31 in the language used by the Holy Spirit to refer to those events that shall come upon the whole world at Christ’s bodily, visible second coming (Matthew 25:31-32; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2 Peter 3:10).

Dear ones, I hope you can appreciate the fact that understanding Christ’s prophecy here in Matthew 24:29-31 as typologically fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem only heightens and magnifies the ultimate fulfillment at Christ’s second coming to which the type pointed. Beloved,

I would have you remember that the Lord is said to come when the Spirit of God comes to minister to His people (John 16:7); when He causes a woman to conceive a child (1 Samuel 2:21); when He tries our faith by various circumstances (Psalm 17:3); when He provides for the needs of His creation (Psalm 65:9); and when He fellowships with us in His ordinances (Revelation 3:20). These figurative/spiritual comings of the Lord are all intended to remind us how near the Lord presently is to His people and His creation. He rides upon the clouds to your defense and help (Deuteronomy 32:26). Nothing can restrain Him or prevent Him from coming to your aid. He will not be a second too late. If there is a delay, it is not due to His slowness or to His lack of love, mercy, wisdom, or power. But it is for your benefit that He delays. That you may all the more look for, seek and anticipate your beloved Savior. And finally, these figurative/spiritual comings of the Lord are intended to turn the eye of hope to the blessed appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ when all blessing will be released from the heavens upon His people (like balloons at a political convention). Nothing of blessing will be on that glorious day withheld from you, the children of God, and likewise, nothing of wrath will be on that glorious day withheld from all His enemies. May these typological comings of Christ in Scripture and in the events of the world, continually points us in hope to that ever greater coming of the Lord at the end of the world.

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