

MAKING SENSE OF THE MATTHEW 24:36 TRANSITION

In Matthew 24:4-35 Jesus is describing conditions that will be in place on the earth during the Tribulation Period (the 70th week of Daniel) which will culminate in His Second Coming to the earth. At verse 36 He introduces a transition that changes the discussion to conditions that will be in place on the earth prior to the first phase of His Second Coming (i.e., the Rapture of the Church).

Matthew 24:36 (NKJV)

36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

The school of thought that claims Christ in Matthew 24:36-44 is continuing to describe conditions related to the 2nd phase of His coming to the earth at the end of the Tribulation Period claims silly things like – while they might know the general time frame, they will not be able to know the exact day and hour.

I would argue that once they get into the Tribulation Period, they might well be able to figure out the exact day of Christ’s Second Coming to the earth.

Here is how they might know. We know from Revelation 13:5 that at the midpoint of the Tribulation Period Antichrist will be given absolute prevailing authority to continue for exactly 42 months. On the Jewish calendar that is exactly 1260 days. Furthermore, we know from Revelation 12:6 that Israel will be preserved during these days in a special place prepared by God for exactly 1260 days.

Well, if Antichrist is going to have absolute sway for exactly 1260 days (the last half of the Tribulation Period) then what is going to happen on day 1261? In at least 7 different places the Bible indicates that Antichrist’s sway over God’s people will be for exactly 3 and ½ years (or 1260) days (cf. Dan. 7:25; 9:27; 12:7; Rev. 11:2; 12:6; 14; 13:5).

I am not mathematician but even I can figure out that if the Antichrist has exactly 1260 days of absolute domination over God’s people from the time He goes into the temple and declares Himself to be God – well, then even I can figure out that something is going to happen on day 1261! What is that going to be? Well, we don’t have to wonder. The Bible plainly tells us that

what will bring the rule of Antichrist to an end is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 (NKJV)

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of **His coming**.

What will bring the Antichrist to an end after his reign of terror for 1260 days? It will be the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ on day 1261! I take it that in the Tribulation Period this can essentially be calculated to the exact day if you know what the Bible has to say.

Therefore, what Christ is describing in verses 36 through verse 44 cannot be talking about His second coming to the earth at the conclusion of the Tribulation Period. My view is that here in Matthew 24:36 Christ transitions to talk about His coming in at the Rapture which cannot be known.

It is noted that God consistently sets specific dates for His program related to Israel. In Genesis 15:13-16, Abraham was told that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land for 400 years which was fulfilled in Egypt. In Jeremiah 25:11-12 the Jews were told they would be captive in Babylon for exactly 70 years. Daniel 9:24-27 gives specific dates related to God's prophetic program for Israel including precisely when the 70 weeks would begin, the timing of the presentation of "Messiah the Prince", the start of the final 70th week, the middle of the week, and the conclusion of the week. We see very specific dating all the way through.

But in contrast, the Church has no dates. It began suddenly and signlessly and it will conclude the same way. After the resurrection Jesus specifically told the disciples, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." (Acts 1:7). The Church is not given dates or signposts like Israel is.

The second phase of Christ's coming at the end of the Tribulation is Israel oriented and has specific dates attached to it. The first phase of Christ's coming (the Rapture) is Church oriented and has no dates attached to it. And that is where we are.

When Christ says, “But of that day and hour no one knows” I believe He is talking about the rapture – the first phase of His Second Coming. No one knows when that will happen.

Even the language of “and hour” doesn’t really apply to the Second Coming to the earth because that will be a protracted drawn-out event that happens very gradually – evidently taking place over many hours. We know it will be similar to when He gradually ascended into heaven as seen in Acts 1 (cf. Acts 1:9-11).

We know that when Christ comes back to the earth “every eye will see Him” as it says in Rev. 1:7. And we know from Rev. 19 that when the heavens are opened and Christ begins His descent to earth that there will be enough time for Antichrist and his forces to gather together “to make war” against the coming Christ (cf. Rev. 19:19).

So what I am saying is that the description of the “hour” doesn’t seem to really apply to His Second Coming to the earth because it will transpire over a protracted amount of time and not necessarily suddenly at just one appointed hour.

This description of no one knows the day nor the hour really only fits the pretribulation rapture. And the language is strong in saying not even the angels know the timing – only the Father. Some have struggled with Mark 13:32 where Jesus is recorded as saying that even He as the Son did not know the timing.

However, this is easily explained even though we can’t completely comprehend the mystery. Christ in His incarnation set aside the independent use of His divine attributes. In His state of humility He depended fully upon the Father and only operated under the direction of the Father. As it says in Phil. 2:7 He “emptied Himself” and was made “in the likeness of men”. As it says in Luke 2:52, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature”. This is only possible in terms of His humanity in His state of humiliation, and yet He remained fully God as well.

This is a great mystery. We do know that in His high priestly prayer the night before He was crucified Jesus asked the Father to glorify Him “with the glory which I had with You before the world was”, so clearly, He had set aside this glory in His incarnation (Jn. 17:4-5).

So the answer is that in His incarnation at that point the Father had not revealed it to the Son, but certainly in the exaltation of His glorification the Son now again shares in the full glory of knowing all things just as He did before the foundation of the world.