

HOW TO VIEW THE END TIMES

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

How we view the end of an era depends of course, on what we're talking about. If you're a student, you may be looking forward with joy to the end of the semester. Or, if you're a high school or college senior, you may be looking adventurously toward the end of your schooling. Any long trip extracts fatigue and the urgency to get it over—especially if you are a parent with two children in the back seat asking every five miles, "Are we there yet?"

Matthew 24 is about an ending. Not the end of school or a long trip. Instead, it is about the end of all ends—when life as we know it now will be no more. Jesus intentionally spoke in veiled language when He spoke of the end times. However, He revealed quite clearly certain things we can expect, assisting us to view the end times properly.

As we focus our study on Matthew 24, we will follow closely the outline below:

- I. The Abundant Problems We Address in End Times (vv. 1-14)**
- II. The Assigned Position Israel Accepts in End Times (vv. 15-19)**
- III. The Absolute Promise the Church Anticipates in End Times (vv. 40-51)**

I. The Abundant Problems We Address in End Times (vv. 1-14)

As we leave chapter 23, Jesus is walking away from the temple, never to return. The temple was the center of Israel's national life and the most permanent fixture they knew. Started by Herod, the temple was a magnificent architectural masterpiece that was an ongoing project even in Jesus' day.

The disciples initiated the conversation concerning the temple (v. 1). Jesus was not at all impressed. In fact, He spoke words about the beautiful structure that surely stunned the disciples to the max: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down" (v. 2). The disciples went stone cold, only later approaching Him again, inquiring precisely what He meant (v. 3).

A lesson exists in this for us. Sometimes when we do not understand why God says what He says or why He moves in a certain way, it is best to ponder it for a season before pursuing it further. The discourse that Jesus offered His disciples in response to their query must be reflected upon deeply and seriously.

There are two traits about this teaching that we must observe. *First, the sermon is not in chronological order.* Try as we may, if we attempt to read it sequentially, confusion will persist. *Second, there are three parts to this sermon, each part of which is divided according to a three-fold division of mankind: Gentiles, Jews, Church* (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:32). Each of these divisions is a theme within itself. Let us begin with the first division of mankind—the Gentiles—and note the abundant problems the end times pose according to Jesus.

There is the problem of *spiritual deception* (vv. 4-5). Jesus' words present a caution: "Take heed" (v. 4). This is a warning against religious deception. The point Jesus drives pertains to refusing to be lead astray by any man. There's a tendency for both individuals and nations to be duped by magnetic personalities. Even now, celebrities grab our attention. Advertising firms understand this, which is why so many commercials seek endorsements from popular stars.

Reflection

Connection

Why was the temple so important to the Jewish people? Is the temple still important? Why or why not?

Reflection

Connection

Does God deal differently with Jews than He does with Gentiles? How are Jews saved?



Political figures like Hitler, Marx and Mussolini demonstrated how susceptible people are being led astray. This susceptibility will be even more pronounced in the end times. When they come saying, “I am Christ” many will believe (v. 5). The conditioning will prepare the godless, humanistic segments of the world to accept the false messiah—*Antichrist*.

There is the problem of *national disruption* (vv. 6-7a). The spiritual deception about which we just learned will lead to national disruption: “Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars” (v.6). Nations will be characterized by endless conflicts. One may protest and say, “But there have always been wars and conflicts.” True. But the conflicts of the past, generally speaking, may be characterized more as pockets. The future conflicts about which Jesus speaks will exist among nations normally at peace with one another. Increasingly, the wars will grow worse until there is the war that will end all war, the final war—*Armageddon*.

Reflection Connection

How will the Great Tribulation be different from tribulation in general? Will believers be here on earth during that time? Explain.

The “end is not yet,” however. Men will never solve the conflicts they have with one another. Though we may think we’ve come of age, that we’re educated and too smart to go to war again, the Bible paints an entirely different picture. Man thinks he’s too *smart* to go to war but the reality is, man is too *sinful* not to. There will be no lasting peace until the Prince of Peace comes!

There is the problem of physical destruction (vv. 7b-8). Note the continued digression: from spiritual deception to national disruption to physical destruction. The spiritual inevitably manifests itself outwardly in the physical, affecting others with devastating results.

The wars that are rumored will become real and create spinoffs of physical mayhem: “famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes” (v. 7b). These are only the beginning (v. 8). Disease will be neither eliminated nor controlled. Vicious new diseases will explode on the scene. We may think AIDS is awful but again, “these are the beginning of sorrows.”

There is the problem of merciless persecution (vv. 9-10). One particular form of persecution Jesus mentions is **terror**: “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you” (v. 9). Even the police are involved in carrying out phony charges against Bible-believing Christians and churches. An ungodly, unchecked world will increasingly hate believers. Why? One reason Jesus offers: “For my name’s sake” (v. 9).

A second form of persecution will be **treachery**. Jesus said, “Many shall be offended, and shall betray one another” (v. 10). Professing Christians who lack authentic faith will defect, no matter their level of involvement with a local church. These days will be extremely difficult. Therefore, only believers can possibly survive. Even families whose ties are only by blood will hate other

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Reflection Connection

In what significant ways will family life be disrupted during the Great Tribulation?



family members and demonstrate such hatred through betrayal. They will abandon the visible, local church because they were not a part of the invisible, Universal Church (cp. 1 John 2:19).

There is also the problem of false preaching (vv. 11-13). False preachers will rise up and “deceive many” (v. 11; cp. 2 Peter 2:1). And because sin will increase, “the love of many shall wax cold” (v. 12). A rise in lawlessness guarantees a cooling of devotion, beginning a vicious cycle that refuses to be breached. Consequently, the ones who endure are saved, not because they endured; *rather, their endurance proved their salvation*. A much-needed reminder on which we all should reflect: the real test of a Christian is not how it started but how it ends.

For all the problems, including the false preaching, however, there is a hopeful song sung during this time: *faithful preaching* (v. 14). God will always have those who faithfully preach the Word of God. The “gospel of the kingdom” will extend as witness to “all nations” (v. 14). The world will not be *Christianized* before Christ returns but it will be *evangelized*.

II. The Assigned Position Israel Accepts in End Times (vv. 15-39)

Keep in mind the *threefold division* Jesus addresses in this chapter: *Gentiles, Jews,* and the *Church*. We focused on the Gentiles above (vv. 1-14). Now our main concern is Israel.

The tone of these verses is distinctly Jewish: “holy place” (v. 15), “Judea” (v. 16), “Sabbath” (v. 20), “elect” (v. 22), “fig tree” (v. 32). Let us also be reminded that the “Great Tribulation” (v. 21) must not be confused with general tribulation (v. 9). The difference is like the difference between the proverbial mountain and mole hill. Christians in all ages experience general tribulation (Acts 14:22). However, the Great Tribulation stands in a class all by itself. Jesus captures the intensity of the Great Tribulation era: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened there should be no flesh be saved” (vv. 21-22).

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No one would survive the moral meltdown of this hellish moment were it not for God’s supernatural intervention “for the elect’s sake” (v. 22). Jesus speaks of specific sins, which precipitates the Great Tribulation (vv. 15-26). Let us look at some of them.

First, there is the sin of desolation (vv. 15-20). Jesus mirrors Daniel’s prophecy when He speaks of the “abomination of desolation” (v. 15; cp. Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). We must proceed with care here or confusion will slip in. Recall at the beginning of this study, we noted that chronology is not the concern of Jesus as He addresses the end times in Matthew 24; instead His major focus is on people groups, if you will—*Gentiles, Jews,* the *Church*. Chronologically, when the “abomination of desolation” takes place, the temple will have been rebuilt and the Church already raptured.



Reflection Connection

Is chronology in the biblical record a major priority of the inspired authors? Why or why not? Discuss a scenario where chronology is crucial.

Reflection Connection

What is the significance of the number "seven"? Why is three and one half significant?

Reflection Connection

How could a person follow one who is given over to so much hate and destruction? Will there be mercy for those who are deceived? Why or why not?

In addition, the Antichrist's power will be fortified into a major European alliance, which has a covenant with Israel. Approximately three and a half years after signing the Israeli peace pact, Antichrist will violate the treaty and set up false idols in the new Jewish Temple. He will even put an image of himself there. "Abomination" is a term, which carries the idea of nausea due to foul odors. Idols are a stench to our Holy God. This "desolation" stands as a visible sign that the Great Tribulation is about to begin. The Lords' word to Israel is, "Flee to the mountains" (v.16) and "Don't even go back for clothing" (v. 18).

The second sin mentioned which precipitates the Great Tribulation is devastation (vv. 21-22). As we noted earlier, Satan's fury will be so ferocious against God's elect that annihilation would surely happen except that God shortened the days (v. 22). If Israel follows Antichrist, they will be spared temporally but be lost eternally because hell awaits them in the afterlife. If they resist Antichrist, they most assuredly will suffer death, but life in bliss beyond awaits them. Christ will receive them!

The third sin which precipitates the Great Tribulation is deception (vv. 23-26). False messiahs one after another, will precede the Antichrist. Even the elect will fall for their phony messages because of the powerful, persuasive feats they perform (v. 24). The next miracle worker will be Antichrist! Jesus warns: "Behold, I have told you before...believe it not" (vv. 25-26).

If there are *sins* which precipitate the Great Tribulation, there are also *scenes* which consummate the Great Tribulation (vv. 27-31). It's like Jesus is showing an ancient form of a slide show, including scenes from what will take place. The ending of the Great Tribulation is pictured with a slide of the "coming of the Son of man" (v. 27). It will be not only *visible* but *public*.

The awful carnage of Armageddon is noted in another slide of a "carcass" and "eagles" (v. 28; cp. Revelation 19:17-29). A further slide shows unusual signs in the heavenlies (v. 29), with the Lord Himself on a cloud (v. 30). The earth "mourns" as Jesus comes back not as a humble carpenter but as Conqueror (cp. Revelation 1:7). No longer will His glory be concealed from the public at large. Now He's revealed with the sound of a trumpet (v. 31; cp. 1 Thessalonians 4:16; however, this is *not* the rapture).

Finally, there are **two signs**, which illustrate the Great Tribulation (vv. 32-39). The first sign is the **fig tree** (vv. 32-35). Fig trees represent Israel (cp. 21:19). Jesus speaks of Israel's future in this passage, the future generation which will witness these things (v. 34).

The second sign is the **flood** (vv. 37-39). The first sign was from *natural* revelation; that is, the created order of the world. This sign is from *special* revelation—the Word of God. From these verses, Jesus makes clear that the conditions of the earth at the Lord's return parallel in a real way conditions of the earth during Noah's time.

Conditions of the earth at the Lord's return parallel the conditions of the earth during Noah's time.



III. The Absolute Promise the Church Anticipates in End Times (vv. 40-51)

Now we come to the third group upon whom our Lord focuses in Matthew 24. We've seen what happens to *Gentile nations* (vv. 1-14) and what happens to *Israel* (vv. 15-39). Now Jesus focuses on the *church* in the end times.

Generally speaking, one of two things happen to believers, both of which involve departing from this world—through bodily death or biblical rapture. If you depart through bodily death as a believer, rejoice! For Scripture teaches to be “absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” If Jesus comes and you depart by biblical rapture, rejoice! For clearly, you have missed the horrible time that awaits the world in the Great Tribulation.

Reflection Connection

What is the great hope of the believer as he awaits the end time? Should Christians be worried about the end? What do Christians do until the end?

The passage before us gives us *three realities concerning the rapture*. The first reality of the church's rapture is **evacuation** (vv. 40-41). Jesus uses the term “taken” (v. 40). The term means “taken in tenderness” and is used to indicate taking one's side in peace and blessing (cp. Matthew 1:20, 17:1; John 14:3). The point is, the church will be rescued—evacuated—before the great and terrible hour when the Antichrist comes. Unfortunately, the ones “left” face the Great Tribulation.

The second reality of the church's rapture is **expectation** (vv. 42-44). The appeal is to “watch” (v. 42) and “be ready” (v. 44). Again, we are told we do not know the hour when the Lord will come (v. 44). How many hucksters there have been who have attempted to dupe the people of God by making predictions about when Jesus was coming back is hard to say. They have all been wrong and always will be. The Christian must live in continual expectancy that Jesus could come any moment. If this principle were pursued on a massive scale by the church, how different the world would be!

Unfortunately, the ones “left” face the Great Tribulation.

Jesus used the analogy of a thief to speak of His return (vv. 43-44). Just as thieves do not announce house calls, neither will Jesus announce His coming to rapture His church. Also, those who are alert and “watch” will always take precautions and prepare for the thief (v. 42). We should so live, that if He comes today, we could shout “Hello Jesus! I've been expecting you!”

The third reality of the church's rapture is **examination** (vv. 45-51). Here Jesus tells a parable about His servants—a *wise* one (vv. 45-47) and a *wicked* one (vv. 48-51).

The servant who is “faithful and wise” is the picture of a faithful pastor busy in the Master's service (v. 45). The pastor feeds the sheep. Furthermore, the “household” is a beautiful picture of the church and is found nowhere else except describing the “healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2; cp. also Ephesians 2:19; Galatians 6:10). God's household is a place for healing people.

In addition, the servant offers the household “meat in due season” picturing the spiritual protein necessary for healthy living (v. 45). The result is the “wise and faithful” servant being promoted to “ruler over all his goods” (v. 47). Unlike the wise servant, the wicked servant is “evil” and depraved, presuming the master



will delay his return (v. 48). The problem is obviously spiritual for he says “in his heart” the master is delayed and, consequently, beats the servants. He even becomes a drunk (v. 49). His habits establish who he really is—a *hypocrite*. Therefore, he gets the hypocrite’s portion (v. 51).

Golden Greek Nugget

In the majority of usages, the Greek term “*cosmos*” is translated “World” in the English versions. It is used almost two hundred times. However, the disciples’ question to Jesus was not concerning the end of the “*cosmos*” but the end of the “*aion*”. “*Aion*” is the root of our word “*aeon*” and refers more to time than space. Thus, the disciples queried Jesus about the end of the age.

Wrap Up

The bottom line is, what does your heart say? Do you know for sure that you will go to heaven when you die? Are you waiting with joy and expectancy on the return of Jesus? Turn to Him today before it’s entirely too late. In fact, tomorrow very well may be too late. In an hour you never expect, Jesus Christ will return. Will you be prepared to meet Him?

