

*The signs of the end times
according to Jesus*



THE GOSPEL
of
MATTHEW
CHAPTER 24 EXPLAINED



Bruce R. Edwards

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Author: Bruce Edwards

Title: Jewish Feasts

ISBN:

Editor: Cover Design: © 2014

Page Design: © 2014

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Introduction

Matthew chapter 24 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible concerning the end times. Jesus answers some key questions and gives us information about the end of this age and His second coming. The Lord didn't provide us with all this information just to confuse us or to divide us, but He shares these incredible insights to help us better understand things surrounding the end times. As we go through this chapter you will gain a very clear understanding of what Jesus is saying.

One of the biggest keys to understanding this chapter is to realize that Jesus for the most part is talking directly to and about the Jews, what THEY should and can expect. He just finished giving the Jewish religious leaders a scathing rebuke in chapter 23. He pronounced seven woes upon them. He also explained how that generation would suffer judgment including the Lord sending them (Israel) into exile once again not for decades or centuries but two millennia because of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. (read chapter 12)

Now Jesus continues on in chapter 24 to teach the disciples about key events to come as it relates to Israel. Most of the events and signs Jesus shares are not about the church it is about the nation of Israel. However, the information shared is important to the church in that when properly understood it helps motivate us into fulfilling our mission.

Matthew records this extended teaching which is referred to as the Olivet Discourse. Jesus shares how the present age ends and what the signs will be that lead to the return of Jesus. Altogether, Jesus deals with four questions:

- When will the temple destruction take place and what will be signs of it's coming destruction?
- What are the signs of Jesus' second coming
- What are the signs of the end of the age
- And what events should not be considered signs of anything

Plus, while answering these questions Jesus gives us a -

- 1) Summary of the events of the Tribulation which lead to His Second Coming
- 2) He reveals and explains a special day called “the coming of the Lord”, different than His second coming, which we now call the Rapture.
- 3) And He gives insights about the Church and the vital roll the Church plays in God’s plan.

So, let’s begin to break down what Jesus is saying.

Explaining Verses 1-8

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of Herod's Temple.

The events recorded in this chapter occur just days before Jesus' trial and death. Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He would teach in the temple court during the day and at night would leave the temple to spend the night in Bethany. Herod's temple was one of the most impressive construction projects ever undertaken in all history.

This chapter opens up with the disciples, who are in awe of the temple, taking Jesus on a tour of the temple before going back to Bethany, and instead of being impressed by the temple Jesus makes an astonishing statement. He says to them that all of the temple was going to come down stone by stone in 3 days. ***Jesus Predicts the Destruction of Herod's Temple.*** This shocks the disciples and causes them to ask Jesus some questions.

Questions for Jesus

In verse 3 Matthew records these three questions –

- 1) When will these things (i.e., the temple destruction) happen?
- 2) What will be the sign of your coming?
- 3) What will be the signs of the end of the age?

Luke in his gospel adds some additional detail to the first question. He includes not only when will the destruction of the temple happen, but what will be the signs that the destruction is going to happen – we will call this question 1A.

As we go through the rest of Matthew chapter 24 Jesus answers these 3 questions, but there are two things about Jesus' answers that we need to take note of;

1. Jesus doesn't answer the questions in the same order they are asked and
2. He also adds another question – What are NOT the signs?

What are Not the Signs of the End of this Age?

This is the first question Jesus answers beginning in verse 4. There are two specific things He makes clear are not to be mistaken as signs of the end and we should not be alarmed by them. He wants to make sure people aren't deceived and don't get confused when they see certain things happen because the real signs are easily confused with ordinary, everyday events.

- 1) Jesus' first warning is that no one should be misled into believing that Jesus had already returned. In other words, don't be misled if you hear others saying Jesus has already come. People speculating and saying that Jesus has come are *always* going to be wrong, and so we can *always* ignore them. When Jesus does come back, He will bring us with Him, so we can't miss it.
- 2) Next, Jesus says don't be worried about wars or rumors of wars. Rumors that wars are happening between Iran and Israel or Russia and Israel or anywhere else are meaningless and should be ignored. We will see why this is important when Jesus tells what the real signs will be that mark the end of this age.

The amazing thing is, we have seen through the years many fall for these counterfeits, and there will be more to come. Isn't it interesting that we rarely if ever see people claiming to be Muhammed or Confucius or Buddha. Why? Because Satan knows who the real God is, so he doesn't bother counterfeiting the others because they are meaningless.

What are the Signs of the End of this Age?

Next Jesus begins to answer question #3 in **verse 7**, “*What are the signs of the end of the age?*” Jesus shares what the signs will be that lead up to and announce that the end of the current age is getting close that is the “*Age of the Gentiles*”. This current age started in 605 BC and continues until it ends when the Kingdom age begins which will be at some appointed time in the future. This is one of the most important keys about the end times. Only when you properly understand what the Age of the Gentiles is, know what the time frame of the age is, and what the purpose of the age is can you accurately put the signs of the end time in proper perspective.

In **verse 8** Jesus adds another important piece of information. He compares the signs that lead to the end of this age with that of what a mother experiences leading to the delivery of a child – “birth pangs”. There are 4 things about birth pangs we should take note of as a mother moves toward the moment of deliverer -

- They are painful.
- They begin mildly.
- They intensify over time.
- They increase in frequency – they get closer together.

Keeping these in mind as we study the signs that Jesus gives us will be huge for us to properly put the signs in proper perspective.

3 Signs of the End of this Age

With that in mind Jesus shares the signs that will signal and announce the end of this age is very near. He gives these three signs in **verse 7 which are:**

1. World Wars (not ordinary wars that always happen – it will be much bigger wars i.e., WW1, WW2...)
2. Famines – it will be the frequency and intensity that are key
3. Earthquakes – again it will be the increase and magnitude.

So, world wars, famine and earthquakes will be indicators that warn people the end of the age of the Gentiles is near, **but only** when they approach the end of the pattern of birth pangs, that is when they start getting worse and more frequent. There have always been wars, famines and earthquakes – it is the increase of intensity and frequency that will be the key. Once the signs of the end of the age reach that level of intensity, there is no turning back and no stopping until the age ends, and the new age comes. We are on a one-way trip to Jesus' return. However, remember the key will be when the signs will follow the pattern of "birth pangs". Through the years many have wrongly interpreted normal famines, wars, earthquakes, pestilence, etc. as the end of the age. Don't fall into that trap. Jesus warned us not to be deceived. That being said every day we are getting closer and closer to His return.

What are Signs of the Destruction of the Temple?

Remember, at the beginning of this chapter Jesus predicted the destruction of Herod's temple. Matthew skips recording the answer to this question and instead jumps to explaining His second coming. (question 2), however Luke in his gospel includes Jesus answer to question #1 and 1A.

Matthew moves forward in time by recording Jesus' answer to question #2 on the signs of Jesus' second coming, while Luke moves back in time to cover Jesus' answer to question #1 and the destruction of the temple in the first century.

SUMMARY OF LUKE'S RECORD OF JESUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION NUMBER 1

(Luke 21:12ff)

The Destruction of the temple in 70AD

Luke 21:12 starts with, “*But before all these things*”. This helps us see clearly that Jesus was talking about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Jesus explains to his disciples that before the destruction of the temple, the church would see persecution, especially church leaders. They would be dragged into synagogues and before governors of Rome, which we see recorded in the book of Acts.

The persecution of the church in the first century was an early sign of the coming destruction of the temple, and in Luke 21:20 it says that the city of Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies. This would be the key sign for the believers of the first century to know that the destruction of the temple was drawing near. That sign occurred in AD 66, when the Roman general Cestus Gallus was sent from Rome to put down a Jewish rebellion in Jerusalem.

The Roman siege eventually resulted in the Roman army penetrating the city walls in AD 70 and destroying the temple. Josephus was a Jewish military commander captured by the Romans who later chronicled the Roman Jewish wars, and during the fall of Jerusalem he witnessed the destruction and wrote about it.

Josephus said that 1.1 million Jews were killed in the city and tells of how the Temple was burned to the ground and the city was utterly laid waste. Titus celebrated the great military victory by commissioning an arch which is still visible in Rome today. It shows the Romans' carrying away the implements of the Temple.

Jesus told His disciples they would know that the temple was about to be destroyed in the first century when armies begin surrounding the city of Jerusalem. This would be the key sign for the believers of the first century to know that the end of the temple was drawing near. (verse 20) He told them to flee the city and don't return. Those who obeyed His word escaped the carnage but those who didn't understand or believe Jesus' words died in the attack. They were among the 1 million Jews who died that day.

History proves and shows us that all these signs leading to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD came to pass just as Jesus predicted.

Summary of verse 1-8 –

Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple. Then He warns people not to be deceived by certain events that may look like signs of the end. Jesus then tells the first century disciples when they see Roman armies surround the city that should be a warning for them to flee Jerusalem. (Matthew didn't record this answer so we went to the gospel of Luke who shared the answer). He then shares the 3 signs that will be a warning that the end of the age of the Gentiles is very near. Let's continue on with - What are the signs of His coming into the Kingdom.

Explaining Verses 9-31

What are the signs of His coming into the Kingdom?

The answer to this question is by far the longest of all the questions. The first thing for us to notice is how extreme tribulation and persecution will once again be the backdrop of these prophetic events, just as believers were persecuted in the 1st century before the temple's destruction so it will happen again before Jesus returns. Jesus says believers will be persecuted, martyred and hated by everyone on earth because of their association with Jesus.

PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

Christians have always been persecuted from the day of Pentecost up to this very day. In some places and at different times in history the persecution was and has been severe. However, immediately before the return of Jesus it will be impossible to be a Christ-follower and not be hated, persecuted and threatened with death.

Jesus now goes on to describe the specific signs that will precede His return and the start of the Kingdom reign. In **verse 10** Jesus says many believers will fall away, betraying one another and even hating one another.

Many have wrongly translated or interpret this as “apostasy” and have tried to apply it to the church. First, the better translation of the Greek word used here, *skandalizo*, is to stumble or to take offense. Jesus is not talking about Christians turning away from their faith in Jesus but rather Christians stumbling (i.e., sinning) in the face of intense persecution. Again, like all signs this has always happened throughout history, but during this time right before the return of Christ the number of believers stumbling will be at an all-time high. Jesus says even to the point of betraying other Christians to save their own skin and to the point of hating other Christians.

Second, Jesus is talking about the time right before His return. The Church will have been removed. (we will cover this in more detail later) However, there will be thousands of believers who get saved during the Tribulation. These are the Christians who Jesus is speaking of that will “stumble – take offense”. (*The apostle Paul however, in his letters does warn the church that in the last days of the church age there will be many who think they are saved who are attending church, but they are not of the “faith” – 1Tim. 4:1 Two different situations don’t confuse them.*)

Next in **verse 11** Jesus says there will be false prophets misleading many on the earth, and lawlessness will increase everywhere and the love of many will grow cold. People will become more ruthless and crueller than ever before. All these are signs of the return of Jesus.

As the end of the age grows closer, the birth pangs will increase such that false prophets will be everywhere and lawlessness will become the new norm as society crumbles under the weight of hatred, pride, and depravity.

CLARIFICATION OF VERSE 13

In verse 13 Jesus says, “***the one who endures to the end of the age will be saved***”. Unfortunately, this verse has been misinterpreted and misused. Jesus is not talking about being “born again” and making heaven. Why? Because we know enduring difficult times is not the means of personal salvation.

Jesus is talking specifically about the Jews during the Tribulation. Daniel teaches that the age of the Gentiles will end at the end of that seven-year period. There comes a moment at the very end of that seven years when the Bible says the Lord pours out His Spirit on all Jews on earth. According to Zechariah, the Spirit will bring these Jews to faith leading them to cry out for Jesus as He returns to them.

This is the event Jesus is referring to here...the moment when all Israel is saved, specifically those Jews who endure to the end. In

essence what v.13 tells us is that **these signs of Jesus' impending return all take place during this coming period of human history called The Tribulation.** In other words, The Tribulation is itself the sign that Jesus is about to return, because the Tribulation is the final seven years before His Second Coming. All the signs will occur in a relatively brief period of history that ends this age and for those who live during this period of history, all these signs will be announcing that the Lord's return is soon to follow.

THE END OF THE AGE versus SECOND COMING

*By way of contrast, the signs that announce the **end of the age** take place over centuries and are witnessed by many generations, but the signs of **Jesus second coming** will occur only during a short period of seven years to be witnessed by those who are alive at that time.*

Let me address the question that causes much controversy, Does the Church experience the difficult times Jesus says are coming before He returns? Short answer - Yes and no. Let me explain.

First, we know the signs that announce the end of the age are for everyone on earth, and in fact those signs are already happening, and some believers are impacted by these things. There is no way to escape them. So, yes to a certain degree Church saints are impacted by things that happen as we approach the end of this age. They are part of life at the end of the age, but we don't need to fear or worry about them. Instead, we should take heed and make everyday count. These signs are to motivate us to be the witnesses we are called to be. It will be the midnight hour. The harvest is plentiful, but the labors are few.

However, there are signs that will only come upon those who are living during the 7-year Tribulation. These will be those who have not believed in Jesus Christ beforehand (i.e., the church will be caught up to with the Lord). The truly severe and alarming

signs that Jesus said will announce His return are reserved for those who live through the Tribulation. We're going to learn later in this chapter that the Lord has a special plan for His Church to protect us from those signs. Let's move on to one of the most significant signs.

The Abomination of Desolation

Verses 15-27 are some of the most significant verses in this chapter. Jesus describes a very important and specific sign – it is “**the abomination of desolation**”. We read about this in Daniel. He tells us this event happens in the middle of a “week” which is the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation. (Dan. 9:27) He says a man (the antichrist) will make a covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will break that covenant stopping the sacrifices and grain offerings in the temple. There will be an idol setup in the temple – an abomination that desecrates the temple.

Jesus says when the desecration of the temple happens, this will be a major sign to those on earth. Jesus says it will be a turning point that triggers a “great tribulation” such as has never been seen on earth before or after. There will be even greater upheaval, the greatest wrath and destruction that God could possibly pour out on earth will be poured out in this final 3.5 years of the Tribulation.

On top of that, Satan becomes especially active in persecuting believers on earth during this time. In fact, Jesus says in verse 22 if God had not set a time limit, all of mankind would be destroyed. This is why the Tribulation is only seven years, and Jesus says the great tribulation will be limited to the final 3.5 years of that time.

Remember, Jesus spoke these words 2,000 years ago to a handful of men sitting on a hillside in Israel. He warned them about events that would occur in the future. Jesus gave them

these signs fully confident that in a future day, His followers would have these words available and they would be read.

I think it is amazing how Jesus clearly believed that what He spoke on that day on that hillside would be remembered, recorded, preserved and shared. Jesus even quoted from the Book of Daniel which was written several hundred years before and knew that all Scripture like that of Daniel would also be preserved and shared over thousands of years. The point I am making is how powerful and reliable the Word of God is. It stands the test of time. Heaven and earth will pass away, but His Word never pass away.

Overview of the Tribulation

The book of Daniel tells us about the Tribulation and that it will last for seven years. Daniel explains how these are the final years of this age immediately prior to Jesus' return. It is referred to as the 70th week of Daniel. Jeremiah calls it "the time of Jacob's trouble". (30:7)

The book of Revelation provides insight and details about the events of the Tribulation. It can be broken down into three parts. Each part plays a distinct role in the events of this prophetic seven-year period. Revelation covers the 3 parts:

- 1) The first half, which is covered in Chapters 6-9
- 2) The mid-point of the tribulation which is covered in Chapters 10-15
- 3) The second half which is referred to as the "Great Tribulation" and is covered in chapters 16-19

The main purpose of the Tribulation is God dealing with the Nation of Israel. This is the last 7 years of the Age of the Gentiles. The Age of the Gentiles is judgment upon Israel under the Old Covenant.

Also, during this time, Revelation says the Gospel goes out into all the nations as a last opportunity to believe and be saved. Thousands upon thousands will be saved – Jews and Gentiles.

Then there comes a moment at the very end of the seven years when the Bible says the Lord pours out His Spirit on all Jews on earth. According to Zechariah, the Spirit will bring these Jews to faith leading them to cry out for Jesus as He returns to them. This is what the Apostle Paul is addressing in Romans 11 when he declares that Israel's rejection is not final. (Rom. 11:26).

Let's move on to the rest of Jesus' (fourth) answer, to the (second) question on signs of His Second Coming. Remember these signs take place entirely within the seven years of Tribulation on earth.

Jesus has given the signs that happen in the earliest period of Tribulation like lawlessness and love growing cold. He then shared the events at the midpoint of Tribulation mainly the abomination in the temple. Now Jesus moves to the very end of the seven years, to the very last days when Jesus' return is only hours away.

In **verse 29** Jesus says that the sun will stop shining which means the moon also goes dark. The stars will no longer be visible either. This will be a climactic moment when all light sources cease, and the world will be plunged into utter and complete darkness.

The world stage will be set for the ultimate entry and final sign of Jesus return that will be witnessed by all on earth. Out of this intense darkness Jesus will appear as a bright sign in the sky, and the angels will be with Him and the Church will follow. Like all the signs in this discourse Jesus is describing the way He will appear from an earthly perspective.

Jesus makes an important distinction in **verse 30** by labeling the nations, that is the unbelieving Gentiles as the “*tribes of the earth*”. This is in contrast to the “*tribes of Israel*”. Israel will be celebrating their Lord’s return as they see Jesus coming in power and glory. The tribes of the earth will not be celebrating they will be mourning because the Lord’s return brings their judgment.

Jesus return has different consequences for different groups of people. To Jews, the Lord brings faith and redemption, along with the believing Gentiles, He will establish the promised Kingdom, but to the unbelieving Gentiles on earth, the Lord brings judgment.

In **verse 31** Jesus says He will send angels to gather the elect, that is all the Jews wherever they may be left in that day and assemble them in Jerusalem as a final sign for those waiting for His return. This will be necessary because the Old Testament promises that all Jews will be assembled in the Promised Land for the Kingdom and the Old Testament promises Israel that at the moment of this gathering for the Kingdom, a great trumpet will be blown.

Is. 27:12-13 – “In that day the LORD will start His threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel. It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.”

Summary of verses 9-31

In response to the question, “what will be the signs of His second coming”, Jesus gives the following signs:

At the beginning of the 7 years of Tribulation there will be an increase of persecution of believers leading some to stumble and hate one another and there will be lawlessness, false prophets,

and a lack of love. Plus, in the middle of all of the calamity there will be a worldwide evangelistic effort.

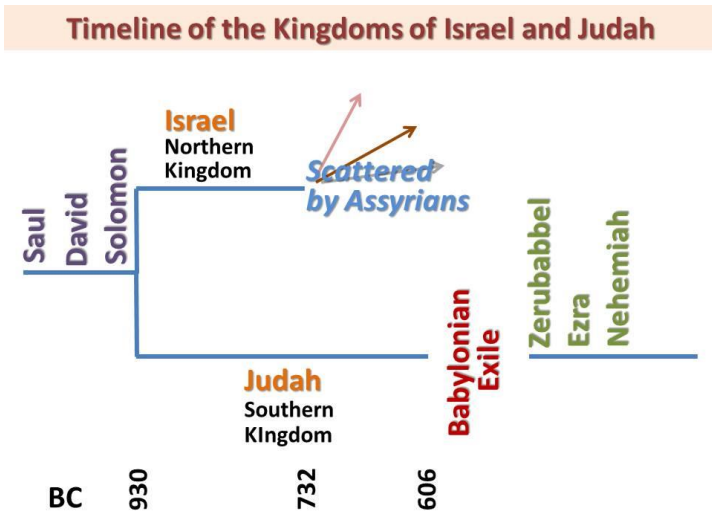
Then at the middle of the seven years, a man desecrates the Jewish temple – “the abomination of desecration”, and it will be a sign of increased intensity of supernatural judgments and even greater persecution through the last half of the Tribulation.

Believers will flee to the mountains as the world undergoes upheaval. False prophets led by Satan will deceive the world and even attempt to deceive believers into following the wrong Christ.

Finally, at the end of the seven years, the world scene is set in darkness and the world witnesses a bright light in the sky as Jesus returns. The elect will be assembled by angels and a great trumpet will sound to announce the arrival of Messiah and His Kingdom, but the unsaved on earth will be mourning their fate as they witness Jesus coming in glory.

Many missed His first coming and in the years since most have missed or ignored the good news of the Gospel. Father God does not intend for anyone to miss His Son’s second coming into His Kingdom. It will not be possible to ignore the signs of Jesus’ Second Coming or to deny the event.

Explaining Verses 32-35



Israel Returns to Its Land – the leading sign...

Beginning in verse 32 Jesus explains one more major sign that will tell us when the end times are set to begin. He uses a parable about a fig tree to introduce this major sign. Why? Because a fig tree is a classic representation of Israel in the Bible and Jesus is revealing how Israel will serve as God's indicator of when the end times are here. The sign that will signal the beginning of things that lead to the end of this age will be when Israel returns to its land as a nation.

In about 995 BC Israel under the rule of King David became a world power in the land of Israel, but just 20 years later the kingdom would split and in about 740 BC the Assyrians captured the 10 Northern tribes - exiled them and scattered them. (2Kings 17) Then in the early the 600's BC the Babylonians defeat the Southern kingdom; Judah is taken captive. For years Israel appeared to have no significance or any place in the world. Its people were dispersed throughout the world outside its land for centuries.

However, a miracle takes place. Beginning in the late 1800's and early 1900's Jews from around the world begin to migrate in large numbers back to the promised land and it continued for several years through the Zionist movement. Then the 1948 declaration of independence established Israel as a nation in the world and formalized what had been happening for decades. The sleepy giant had been awakened. Israel was back in the land.

In verse 34 Jesus make a very key statement. He says, ***“this generation will not pass away until “all these things” take place”***. This has been a source of considerable confusion and misinterpretation in the Church. Many people predicted Jesus would return in 1988 – 40 years from 1948 the years of a generation. Obviously, He didn't.

Listen, Jesus wasn't talking about a single human generation. He said “this generation” not “a generation. He was referring back to the fig tree. Jesus was speaking of the entire nation as a new generation of Israel, not merely one chronological generation.

So, Jesus said “this” generation, meaning “this nation of Israel,” won't pass away until all these things come to pass.

The leading sign that lets us know the end of the age is coming - is when Israel returns to the promise land, ... and that day has already come. You can be sure everything else Jesus said is coming.

Explaining Verses 36-51

There is a very important transition that takes place beginning in **verse 36**. We know this because of the use of a transitional phrase... “but of that day...”

Jesus is not referring to any day that He has been speaking about up to this point. Jesus makes a quick transition to speak about something entirely new and different. He’s not talking about “that day” in the sense of any day or time He has previously mentioned. Instead, He’s talking about “that day,” as in a specific and special day that no one had heard about before.

The context of verse 36 confirms this because Jesus basically says “that day” has no signs whatsoever, in fact He doesn’t even know the timing of this special day. Think about it, Jesus is saying there is an event in God’s plan for the end times, a “day” He calls it, which has absolutely no advanced warning, no signs at all.

This is how we know Jesus is speaking about a new and different day rather than one of the events He previously described because all the previous events, whether the destruction of the temple, or the end of the age, or even His return, have warning signs. So, the million-dollar question is – what is this “day” that Jesus wanted His disciples to be aware of even though they can’t know when it’s about to happen?” It is what we call today – The Rapture.

In explaining this unique “day” Jesus breaks it down in to three parts:

1. The circumstances surrounding this special day.
2. The details of how it unfolds.
3. The purpose of the day, or why it exists.

The following is an explanation of each:

Part 1 – the circumstances

In **verse 37** Jesus gives a reference point, it is the days of Noah. Jesus says the circumstances surrounding this future day to come will be “just like” the days of Noah. There are several things Jesus points about the days of Noah -

1. Life seemed normal to the world, there was no sense of impending doom. Jesus says people were eating, the economy was good, the routine of life happened.
2. People were drinking, in other words life was a party, people celebrated daily life – they had no reason to worry or to panic. More than that, it indicates debauchery and excess, a world unafraid of God.
3. Marriages were happening – people were optimistic about life and the future. People marry because they are looking to the future, to a life together, to making a family having a home, etc.

However, they were wrong. The Lord had already determined to destroy life with the flood. In Genesis 6 God told Noah that He would bring an end to all life on earth in 120 years. God directed Noah to use that time to construct an ark by which he could save himself and his family. So, while the world assumed the future was bright, the reality was it was about to be destroyed.

Just like in the day of Noah there will be a complete lack of awareness by unbelievers that a day of major consequence is coming. However, the people of God will be aware of that day approaching and will be prepared by God to escape it.

Through the years people have been confused about the escape of the church and the second coming of Jesus. Again, Jesus is talking here about a day very different than His actual Second Coming, because circumstances surrounding each event are complete opposite. Jesus explained earlier that He will return at the end of a seven-year Tribulation and throughout those seven years, the

world will be rocked by signs that announce the return of Christ is near. Life during that time will be anything but ordinary...people will not be eating, drinking, marrying, and living life without worry.

Part of the confuse comes because Jesus refers to “that day” as the coming of the Lord. However, this will be a very different day than the actual day of His Second Coming. He’s talking about a day that will surprise everyone, a day that has no warning signs at all.

This day is a return to rescue the Church, to bring the church saints to Heaven prior to the onset of the judgments of Tribulation. It’s a type of return yet one that is different than the one that ends the age. It will be similar to the way God protected Noah and his family, making a way of escape shortly before the flood waters arrived.

Think about after God put Noah’s family in the Ark and the “Lord shut them in”. (Genesis 7:16) It began to rain. The people outside the Ark did not know what to think. Then the first day went by, the second day, the third day, etc. - the flood waters begin to rise and at some point, they realize things are desperate – “they had missed the boat”. We can only imagine what those outside the Ark may have been doing, screaming, begging Noah to let them in – but it was too late.

“That Day” the day Jesus is talking about will be much like the day of Noah. When God ‘shuts in’ all those who had believed into the Ark of Jesus. The first day (year) of tribulation happens, then the second, the third... Selah.

Part 2 – details how this day unfolds.

Jesus didn’t explain the details of how the rapture unfolds in the Olivet discourse, however He does during the Last Supper. During this time Jesus announces to His disciples that He is leaving, but they need to understand that His departure doesn’t mean the end of ministry if fact it was just the beginning.

In John 14 He tells His disciple that one day He will return for the church. To fully understand what Jesus is saying we need to realize He is comparing His return for the Church to the Jewish wedding traditions of His day.

There are many unique steps in a Jewish wedding such as, the groom didn't know when he would claim his bride because the father made that determination. The father would only permit the son to claim the bride after the father was satisfied that his son's work on the bride's home was complete. The son worked quickly to complete the room, but the father had the final word on when it was done.

Just like the groom Jesus has gone to prepare a home for His bride (the Church) and will return to "receive" His bride when the Father says so. Today we are "betrothed" to Christ by our faith and we have entered into the New Covenant with Him as we wait for that moment of being united.

TOTALLY DIFFERENT THAN SECOND COMING

In John 14:3 notice Jesus "receives" us to Himself and then at the end of the verse Jesus adds that after He has received us to Himself, we will be with Him where He *was*. We know Jesus departs Heaven to receive us off the earth, so that means we return to where He was...in Heaven. The rapture is Jesus returning from Heaven to remove His Bride from earth and return her to Heaven. Jesus never touches earth at the rapture. *He remains above and we go UP to be with Him.*

This important detail is proof Jesus is talking about a day that's different than His Second Coming. The Second Coming of Jesus is a completely opposite. At Jesus' Second Coming, He also departs from Heaven, but this time He returns to earth AND when He gets here, He stays on earth to rule the Kingdom - **AND** Revelation 19 says when He comes, Jesus brings His Bride with Him, which means we started in Heaven with Him. Those details are the opposite of the rapture – *Jesus comes to earth and we come DOWN with Him.*

Part 3 – the purpose of this day (the rapture)

God does everything in a certain way for a reason, but why does this day happen in such dramatic fashion raising the entire Church in the same instant? Why make the saints who have died wait to be raised at the Rapture with those who are still alive? What is the purpose of this day?

First, this day is to remove the church from harm's way. God has always protected His people before judgment falls upon the wicked. Before God flooded the world, Noah's family was removed by getting in the ark. Today Jesus is the Ark – everyone who get is the Ark of Jesus will rise above the outpouring of God's wrath.

Second, we need to be resurrected into a new body to live in the Kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 Paul explained how, believers in an instant will exchange their old, dying body for a new eternal body. Paul is speaking about the moment we are raptured...the moment we leave earth and enter in the presence of God. Flesh and blood cannot inherent the Kingdom of God. We need an incorruptible and immortal body so that we can enter the Kingdom of God...we need to be resurrected.

Third, this day is to help us to stay alert and prepared. In verses 42-44 Jesus explains that He designed this day to be a surprise so that we will have an incentive to stay alert at all times and to be prepared when that day comes.

He says the Rapture is coming like a thief in the night, at an hour that will surprise us. God has planned the coming of the Lord in such a way that we have to treat every day as potentially our last day on earth and to make everyday count. In fact, He says specifically that He is going to come at a day and on an hour when we don't expect Him to arrive. We should be motivated to spend every day carefully, thoughtfully, and fruitfully.

Fourth, this day is designed to motivate us to stay diligent in accomplishing our purpose – individually and corporately. Jesus uses the parable of the “master and faithful

and unfaithful servant” to explain why. Jesus is the master, and we are the servants.

The parable tells of how the Master expects the servants to do their job when He is away. Servants stay diligent in the master’s absence when they know the Master could return at any moment unannounced and with no warning. Why? They know upon His return He will check to see if they have done their work in His absence, and He will reward each accordingly.

The main point of this parable is when the master returns, he expects His instructions to have been carried out and all work to have been accomplished just as if He had been there. Those who meet His expectations will be rewarded.

Verse 46 says there is a blessing for the servant who is doing as the master commanded when the master returns but **verses 48-51** says the unfaithful servant will be punished when the master returns and the master will send him away to be with the hypocrites, where people will cry there will be gnashing of teeth. grind their teeth with pain.

The purpose of the rapture isn’t only to give us new bodies... it’s also when we receive our rewards. Following the rapture, Jesus will evaluate the works of believers done in service to Him and those who have served Him faithfully will be rewarded for that service.

This is not a moment to determine if we are saved or if we go to Heaven no service or good work is ever required because you cannot earn what comes by grace alone. However, all believers will experience a judgment in which Christ considers the work we did for Him while living in this body. (2Corinthians 5:10)

TODAY IS THE DAY OF SALVATION – DON'T WAIT

Since the rapture comes without warning in the blink of an eye, don't think you can “get right with Jesus” at the last moment.

Whether you are an unbeliever thinking you can confess Christ on your death bed or you're a believer thinking you can get serious about obeying Jesus when you see the rapture coming, don't be fooled. Don't think you can outsmart God, because you will be disappointed. If you have never accepted Jesus and you are waiting for just the right time don't delay. If you keep putting it off to tomorrow – tomorrow may never come.

If you are saved today is the day to believe now is the time to obey your Master, and if you delay your obedience, you be like that unprepared homeowner • You will be caught off guard and you will lose your possessions.

Summary - In the Meantime What?

So, what do we the church do in the meantime? Let's briefly review our situation:

1. We know that judgment for the world is fast approaching, because we can see some of the signs of the end of the age that Jesus told us to watch for. The most significant is Israel is back in their land (part of it).
2. We know that the key signs of Jesus second coming occur during the 7-year tribulation to warn those on the earth the return of Jesus is near. One of the most significant is the "desolation of abomination" that occurs in the middle of the Tribulation.
3. We know that there is "a day" coming when the church is caught up to be with the Lord before the 7-year tribulation.
4. We know even though we are saved from wrath, the world we live in will become increasingly evil, as we wait for "that day" – the rapture.
5. We know while we have a mission, and it is critical we keep our focus and attention on that mission.
6. We know that as we serve God with the mission, He gave us, these last days can be our best days.
7. We know we will receive rewards for being faithful to the mission and call God has given us.

While we are living in very wicked times the truth is our day isn't even close to the evil that Noah endured in his day. However, we will see that wickedness continue to get worse and worse and it will happen faster and faster.

The Apostle Paul wrote about in 2 Timothy 3:1-4, ***“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, °***

Just as Noah was NOT called to fix the world he lived in; we are not called to fix the world we live. Just as Noah needed to move his attention away from fixing the world and onto his mission of building the ark...so we must not waste our time trying to fix the world we need to be building the church – rescuing people out of the world and bringing them in to the kingdom of God.

So, instead of being depressed or angry or discouraged by the days we live in, we can be filled with purpose and joy, because we move our eyes off the world and on to Jesus and the rescue He has planned for His Church. We aren't going down with this ship; we are called to help people into our life raft.

The church today has perhaps the single greatest witness opportunity any in all of history. This is the time for the Church to fulfill its mission. We need to be about our Father's business, building the ark and loading it up with as many passengers as we can. When I say building the ark, I mean preaching the gospel, and being a witness in these dark times.

1Thessalonians 4:13-18, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

What I want you to notice here is verse 18. Paul says comfort one another. I want everyone who reads this to be comforted. There is no fear for a believer when it comes to the end times. Paul is talking about the same day here that Jesus was describing in Matthew 24:36ff and John 14:1ff. Paul calls this day the coming of the Lord, which is the same term that Jesus uses in Matthew 24. All the direction of movement Paul describes here is the same as the movement Jesus describes in John 14. Paul says Jesus returns from Heaven, then believers are caught up (or received) to Jesus and we remain with Jesus after that. So we know Paul is speaking of the same day here.

“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Luke 21:28

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ABOUT THE END TIMES

Jesus answers several questions and topics regarding the end of this age and His second coming including -

- When will the temple destruction take place and what will be signs of it's coming destruction?
- What are the signs of Jesus' coming
- What are the signs of the end of the age
- And what events should not be considered signs of the end of this age
- Summary of the events of the Tribulation which lead to His Second Coming
- He reveals and explains a special day called "the coming of the Lord", which we now call the Rapture.
- And He gives insights about the Church and is it's vital roll in God's plan.

Pastor Bruce Edwards is a pastor and teacher of the Word of God. He helps churches and ministries breakthrough to the next level of God's vision for their life and ministries. He and his wife Trudy have two children and six grandchildren.



**THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW
CHAPTER 24 EXPLAINED**

