

NOT YOUR DAD'S END TIMES STUDY 2024

Session 1 - Matthew 24

We are beginning our new study this week - a study of the end times. I'm calling this "Not Your Dad's End Time Study" because rather than me indoctrinating you into a specific way of believing God's end times plan, I'm going to lead you in a study of the end times beginning with the clear passages pertaining to the end times. Once we have laid a foundation of what the black and white teaching is on the end times, we can move forward into the less clear and more obscure passages that deal with the subject matter. My goal is that you will have a solid foundation and framework from which to answer your own questions concerning how God is going to bring about the end of human history and usher in eternity.

Now before we begin, I've got to give you a few notices. First, since the end times has not happened yet, we don't know exactly how things are going to go down. You will have a multitude of questions throughout this study and some of them I will be able to answer with the Scriptures while others no one can answer. There are some things we just are not told by God and those are matters to which we must wait and see how things play out. What we do know is that when all is said and done, every word of Scripture will be confirmed. We may not recognize it while it is happening but we will see God as faithful and true to His Word in the end. Along this line, this is a hotly debated topic in theology. There are many different camps when it comes to beliefs in the end times and many of these camps have multiple divisions within them. When searching for a Biblically accurate view of the end times, it must contain these three elements to be valid: 1) Jesus is physically returning to planet earth, 2) No one knows when this will happen, & 3) You had better be ready. Everything else is open for debate.

When it comes to these various and differing beliefs concerning the end times it's important to keep certain things in mind. The vast majority of these belief systems concerning the end times are held by Bible-believing, evangelical brothers and sisters in Christ. They all have roots in the Bible. I have studied a multitude of these various beliefs in depth. From the time I was a child until the time I was in college, I was taught one specific way of looking at the end times. Many in Bible-believing, evangelical churches hold to this belief. In fact, it's probably the most widely held belief concerning the end times. However, while in seminary, I was discussing the end times with a long-time friend and co-worker from my home church and he told me that what I was spouting off to him was not anything I had learned from an honest study of the Scriptures. He felt I was merely spouting off the indoctrination we had both been given growing up. I was slightly offended in that I could recite a book, chapter and verse for what I believed. Then he challenged me. He told me to read the New Testament with an open mind. To use the tools we had learned in seminary and apply them critically to the passages dealing with the end times. He bet me that if I did that I would come out with a different way of looking and believing about the end times. I did take him up on it and he was right. I did end up looking at the end times differently. So what I'm going to take you on is a journey and this journey isn't to get to believe what I believe but rather to show you what the Bible says clearly about the end times and then how that can guide us to see how the other passages fit together. Here's the deal: none, zero, empty set of these belief systems can answer all the questions satisfactorily. The one I am using as the template for this class answers the most with the least contradictions or problems with the clear passages. (That's why I hold to it.)

Another matter is that the subject matter at hand is inherently fear-provoking. It deals

with a future time. I'm not going to go out of my way to over-dramatize the descriptions given in the Bible. They are terrible enough to frighten any sane human into a state of desiring salvation. The truth is that every time the end times is brought up by a New Testament author, it is to invoke hope in those who believe and are saved. While the world will fall from bad to worse and Christians will share in the hard times to come, they will not face God's wrath and will eventually be vindicated and given eternal life while those who refuse God's gift of grace will pay eternally for their lack of vision in hell. As God's children we need to keep in mind that even though times will be really tough for us, these teachings are to give us hope and remind us of our bright eternity with the Lord Jesus.

Q: When you hear the phrase "end times" what do you think of? (The New Testament authors refer to the end times to mean any time after Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.)

[Read Hebrews 1:1-2] - The author of Hebrews was considering the time when he wrote to be in the period of the last days and he wrote around 55 AD. The entirety of all our lives has been lived in the last days. However the Bible does make a distinction between the "end times", "last days" and "the last day", "judgment day".

Q: Before we get too far along, I want to know if there are any questions you have concerning the end times that you would like to see covered in this study? (*Write down any responses*)

Tonight, we're going to start the study off with Matthew 24. (This chapter has its parallels in Luke 21 and Mark 13). As with the rest of Scripture, it's important to take into account the entire passage and look at the context and treat it like we would treat any other passage in Scripture to find its interpretation.

I. The setting of Jesus' words [Read Matthew 24:1-3]

A. Jesus and His disciples were exiting the Temple and the disciples, country boys, were marveling at the grandeur of the Temple. It would be like a group of people visiting NYC for the first time and gawking at the skyscrapers.

1. Jesus told them not to be overly enamored with the building as it was going to be torn down so that not one stone would be left on another. It would be a total destruction of this grand Temple.

2. The party moved across the way from the Temple to the Mount of Olives and the disciples asked Jesus two questions.

a. When will these things be? (When will the Temple be torn down?)

b. What will be the sign of Your coming/the end of the age? (How will we know Jesus' second coming?)

c. While the disciples felt that this was only one question, we know by Jesus' answer that it was actually two distinct questions as He answers two questions in the following explanation throughout the rest of the chapter.

d. The answer Jesus gives His disciples to these questions intertwines in a way that can be difficult to understand. The most important fact to keep in mind is that Jesus is using the answer about the destruction of the Temple to foreshadow and illustrate His answer about His second coming - mainly that there are things one can do to be prepared for this coming given this

advanced warning.

B. Before getting too far along in the study, we need to examine two terms that show up in this chapter and other places in the New Testament that deal with end times.

1. “the end of the age” - this phrase is used six times in the New Testament.

(Matthew 13:39, 40, 49, 24: 3, 28:20 and Hebrews 9:26)

a. The five times it appears in Matthew are direct and overt references to the final judgment and the consummation of all things.

b. **[Read Hebrews 9:26]** - (This verse sees the Cross as introducing the coming age and thus marking out “the end of the ages”.

2. “parousia” - this is the Greek word for presence, arrival or coming. It doesn’t always have an end times meaning but it usually does in the New Testament and when it does it means “appearing” or “coming” at the end of human history and Christ’s glorious return.

II. The end is near but how near? [Read Matthew 24:4-14]

A. One of the greatest temptations in times of great difficulty is to follow blindly any self-proclaimed savior who promises help and relief. Jesus warns His disciples not to be misled when times get rough. The question is which question is Jesus answering here?

Q: Do these remarks deal with the destruction of the Temple or the end of the age? Why do you give that answer? *(This section deals with the end of the age. Look at the end of v.6 - “not yet the end”. Also see v.14 - “then the end will come”. These signs are considered birth pangs. When a woman gets towards the end of her pregnancy, she begins to experience birth pangs. These are pains that tell her that true labor is right around the corner and that the birth is going to happen soon. Just as these signs point to Jesus’ immanent return.)*

Q: When did the end times begin? *(Hebrews 9:26 - at the Cross)*

3. These signs are general in nature and will be present throughout the end times. Their presence lets believers know that God will be faithful in bringing a final judgment upon mankind. Notice that Jesus says nothing about them becoming more intense or frequent before His return, merely that they will always be a part of what is called the end times. What they don’t tell us is when. Like birth pangs, we don’t know how long it the time between the contractions begin and the eventual time of the baby’s birth.

Q: What are the general signs associated with the birth pangs? *(v.5 - many will be misled by false Christs, v.6 - wars and rumors of wars v.7 - famines and earthquakes, v.9 - Christians persecuted, hated and killed for their faith, v. 10- many so-called believers will fall away from the faith and will hate one another, v. 11 - false prophets crop up, v.12 - most people’s love will grow cold, v.14 - the gospel will be preached to the whole world.)*

b. This entire chapter can be summed up with one word in the Greek . v. 9 - “thlipsis” (persecution, tribulation, distress) This word occurs four times in Matthew and three of them in this chapter (13:21, 24:9,21,29). It relates to this entire chapter’s structure. Jesus establishes thlipsis as the characteristic of this age - the one in which we now live. It is because of this tribulation that many will turn away and grow cold in their love and become lawless.

2) v.13 - the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.

What does this verse mean? *(The word “saved” in Greek has a variety of meanings. It can mean spiritual salvation but also physical deliverance or rescue. Look at the word “but” at the beginning of the verse. This means it ties this verse to the one before it. The key is that it is not teaching a works based salvation - we must do something to earn our salvation. Jesus is using it to teach us what a true believer will look like. A true believer will be one who continues to follow Jesus instead of one of many false Christs and this believer will also be one who continues to love others with God’s love instead of their heart growing cold. Many so-called Christians will show their true colors in this time but the true believers will endure to the end because they are true believers.)*

Q: Where is the only reference to when the end of the world will happen in this set of verses? *(The only verse that mentions anything specific as to when the end of the age will actually happen is in v. 14 - the gospel will be preached throughout all the world. Until the every nation has heard the gospel, these signs (birth pangs) will persist but the end will not happen yet. The word “every nations” means the whole inhabited world - every people group. What is interesting is that the spread of the gospel happens even though persecution of believers is happening. So Jesus has said nothing of timing other than this verse. These signs are going to be happening all through the final age of history but until the gospel is heard everywhere, the end will not come. Even then, we have no idea when the last person of the last nation God is waiting to hear the gospel actually will happen. So even this gives us no real time frame of when.)*

III. A picture of the end is the fall of Jerusalem [Read Matthew 24:15-21]

A. This selection of verses only pertains to the fall of Jerusalem. It is too narrowly set to be referring to both the fall and the coming of the Lord. However, while it isn’t referring to the day of the Lord, it does show us an illustration of it in the near future of Israel. Remember, Jesus has JUST told the disciples that this entire age - this entire end times - will be a time of tribulations. That will be its characteristic.

1. “abomination of desolation” - the original setting for this phrase is found in Daniel (8:13, 9:27, 11:31, 12:11). In Daniel it refers directly to an evil ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes IV. This man conquered Jerusalem and then erected a altar to Zeus over the altar of the Lord and then sacrificed pigs on it. He made the practice of Judaism a capital offense.

2. Jesus is identifying certain elements of what is about to happen to Jerusalem again to those things that were described in Daniel’s prophecies. The “let the reader understand” is meant to draw the reader’s attention to the passage’s true meaning in Daniel.

a. Historically, this happened in 68 AD when the Romans sieged Jerusalem and the Christians fled the city. The city eventually fell in 70 AD and the Romans set up their standards in the Temple complex and defiled the entire city and murdered the high priest and installed a false high priest in his place - one that would sacrifice defiled animals to Caesar.

b. The instructions Jesus gave were to His followers at that time and were to flee the city in haste and not get caught up on the siege. When you see the enemy army approaching, that’s the time to flee. If you go to get your possessions, it will be too late. You’ll get stuck in the city and die. According to history, this is exactly what happened. The Christians took off before the

siege was put in place by the Roman army under general Titus.

c. This event happened in history and again, Jerusalem was destroyed by a pagan army and the Temple defiled and ultimately destroyed. The great tribulation of v.21 refers to this complete destruction of Jerusalem which was accomplished in 70 AD. Jerusalem would never be destroyed in this way again. From a historical standpoint, while 6 million Jews were killed by the Nazis in WWII and another 2 million were killed by Stalin, never was so high a percentage of a great city's population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans. Also, the phrase describing the greatness of the tribulation cannot refer to the Great Tribulation as the Millennium follows. It would be understood that nothing of this nature would occur again. Instead, this formula describes a time before the Great Tribulation - that is 70 AD.

B. Warnings against false messiahs during the birth pangs. **[Read Matthew 24:22-28]**

1. "those days" - many assume that the phrase "those days" is referring to the fall of Jerusalem just mentioned. However, it fits better in the discussion from vv.4-14 - referring to the general time of the end times.

Q: Why does this passage go with the general topic of the end times instead of the fall of Jerusalem? (v. 22 - "the sake of the elect" - remember the Christians had already fled Jerusalem in the illustration of vv. 15-21. The only people left were Jews in the city.)

a. The phrase "no life" "literally "all flesh" or "no one" usually refers to all mankind. (Luke 3:6, I Peter 1:24) Considering the 20th century saw 2 world wars, faces constant threat of nuclear annihilation and has seen more Christian martyrs than the previous 19 centuries combined, it's not hard for us to imagine Jesus' words coming true here. The good news (and this is true of end times discussions in the Bible, they are given with hope. God is still sovereign. He will intervene in human history at some future point by returning.)

c. Thus v. 22 is a transition verse back to the original topic of the end times as Jesus goes back to His discussion of false Christ's in vv.23-26.

2. The Christian faith involves the sober responsibility of neither believing lies nor trusting imposters. As false Christs proliferate so will their heralds and followers. There are a number of things that have not been revealed by God concerning the events of the last days and what life will be like after that day. **[I John 3:2]**

Q: According to the I John verse, what don't we know about our lives after the second coming? *(We don't know what our bodies will be like other than they will be like Christ's resurrected body. Don't give into a false prophet claiming to know exactly what our lives will be like after the second coming - it hasn't been revealed.)*

Q: Why will Jesus' followers be tempted to follow after these false Christs in the end times? (v. 24 - *These false prophets will accomplish mighty miracles. They will put on a fantastic show. The false prophets will be so successful that even the true followers of Christ will be tempted to follow them but since the true disciples have been warned, they will remain firm with Christ.*)

3. The Messiah's second coming will be a public event. It will be unquestionable and not confined to any small group of subset of believers. As lightning is visible everywhere to

all, so will Jesus' second coming be.

Q: What do you think the interpretation of Jesus' saying in v.28 is? *(While the meaning of this proverb is disputed and difficult, I think the most likely meaning is that just as it is impossible for a vulture not to spot a dead body, it will be impossible to miss Christ's second coming. In other words, His coming will be that obvious and open for all to see. A possible meaning is that just as vultures gather around dead animals, so false prophets will gather around those who are spiritually dead. Both do justice to the context of the passage but the first meaning is preferred as it follows the statement on lightning.)*

IV. The coming of the Son of Man [Read Matthew 24:29-31]

A. Here Jesus begins with the word "immediately". Here we need to take a break to discuss the meaning of two important words.

1. imminent - means expected to follow closely or about to occur. Something is on the verge of happening. For us, the return of Christ is imminent.

2. immediate - means to happen at once or right away.

3. After the time of the thlipsis or general period of tribulation, Jesus will return.

Thus the coming of the Son of Man does not immediately follow the abomination of desolation but rather the general period of tribulation of this age, where we find ourselves now.

4. The "sign" mentioned in v.30 will be given which is the actual return of Christ to earth. Notice that Matthew's discussion here includes both the sign of Christ's return and the trumpet sound.

Q: How many "returns" do we see Christ making in this passage? zero, one, two, three or more? *(There is only one return mentioned in this passage. This sign will prompt all nations to mourn which is a reference to Zechariah 12:10-12.)*

5. While the nations mourn the return of Christ, the elect, the believers are gathered together with Christ at this time (v. 31).

V. The significance of the birth pangs [Read Matthew 24:32-36]

A. This parable of the fig tree is easy enough to understand. Just as a person knows the season of the year by observing the condition of a fig tree's leaves, a believer can know the season of the end age by observing the condition of the world. v.33 - when you see all these things.

1. The "all these things" refers to the events described in vv. 4-28 but not the second coming. The parable is discussing how to tell when the second coming will happen or when it will be on the verge of taking place and thus, it refers to the things of the general period of tribulation just before the second coming of Christ.

2. While these events do let us know that the second coming is imminent "right at the door", it doesn't tell us the day or the hour.

B. V. 34 is one of the most misinterpreted verses of the New Testament because too many people try to stretch it to mean too much or too little. Jesus felt it was important because He opened it with "I tell you the truth".

1. This generation is the generation living with Jesus.

2. However, “all these things” does not include the second coming. So the “all these things of v.33 is the same group of things Jesus is referring to in v.34. Remember, Jesus’ main discussion is about the turbulent times, the times of the birth pangs, of the thlipsis.

3. So then, all that v.34 demand is that the distress of vv. 4-28, including the fall of Jerusalem, happen within the lifetimes of the current generation of those living with Jesus. So while all those things will happen to some degree during that generation, it doesn’t set a time limit on the end of when the thlipsis will happen. In other words, it is assured that during the lifetimes of those who were living in Jesus’ day and time, the thlipsis (general tribulation) would occur.

a. This truth is certain as these are Jesus’ words (v.35) His followers can count on it.

Q: Who knows the time when Christ will come again? *(No one knows the day or hour of the second coming save the Heavenly Father. The phrase “day or hour” is an figure of speech that means no one knows the precise time. Don’t fall for the “we don’t know the day or the hour but we do know the month and the year” boloney. That would violate the intention of the figure of speech Jesus used. We can know the season but to pinpoint one second out of a three month season is futile. To argue or get wrapped up on this matter is foolishness and divisive. We can rest in ignorance that it will happen and we can be understand the signs the lead up to it.)*

Q: Why do you think that God did not tell us the exact time and date of Christ’s return? *(There are many reasons. Not knowing the exact time forces us to act on faith in the Lord throughout our lives. It also doesn’t allow for a person to live in sin until the last minute and then get saved or clean up their act. Story of friend who told me that he was not interested in getting saved at the time we were talking about it but rather he was planning on doing it just before he died. I pointed out that he didn’t know when he was going to die or did he know if Christ would return before his death and catch him unprepared.)*

4. Since no one knows the time of the second coming, the only reasonable act by those of the faith is to be prepared. **[Read Matthew 24:37-42]**

a. Human life will be going on just as it has always been going on. Just as life was going on just before God wiped out the earth with the flood but saved Noah and his family, so it will be the same just before Jesus returns. Remember also that the days of Noah were exceedingly wicked and dark days on the earth. That’s why God despaired creating man and wiped out all of mankind save Noah and his family. **[Genesis 6: 5-8]**

b. Notice that people will be doing daily chores when the rapture occurs, when Jesus returns. We know this refers specifically to the return of Jesus due to v. 37. Thus despite the close ties the men may share or the women may share one is taken and one left. This goes back to v.31 when the angels gather up the believers.

c. In Noah’s day, when God shut the door to the ark (Genesis 7:16). On the same day that God saved Noah and his family, He judged the rest of the world. Both salvation for the righteous and judgment for the wicked happened on the same day - through the same act. This mirrors what we see in Matthew 24. The Lord’s return saves His children but at the same time condemns the lost.

VI. Be ready for Jesus' coming [Read Matthew 24:43-51]

A. There are two parables given by Jesus and the point is the same for both: be ready for Jesus' return.

1. If you know a thief is coming to rob you at night, stay awake and prepare for it so that he gets nothing. Notice the Son of Man is coming when you don't expect Him to come. Jesus is talking to His disciples here.

2. A faithful slave is the one who does what his master has assigned him to do faithfully. There is a difference given between a good slave and a bad one. The bad one thinks of himself and pursues his own agenda. He believes a lie - that his master won't return for a long time. The problem is that eventually the master will return. The problem with living sinfully is that it leads one to focus on the here and now and not on the things of eternity so one forgets what is coming and lives for the moment. This leads one to not being ready when the Master returns. Notice, he joins the hypocrites in the weeping and gnashing of teeth. The phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is a favorite phrase of Jesus when referring to hell. (Jesus uses it seven times in the gospels: six in Matthew one in Luke.)

We aren't going to examine Matthew 25 as a part of this study. In that chapter Jesus told His disciples three parables that all had the same basic meaning. They dealt with some aspect of being prepared for Jesus' return. The subject of being prepared is critical in Jesus' mind as He hammered it with two parables in chapter 24 and then 3 more in chapter 25.

Q: This begs the question, what does it mean to be ready for the Lord's coming? (*Accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. Accept the truth that you have sinned against a holy God and your life has fallen short of where God designed your life to be. (God designed you and gave you life so that you could enjoy full and eternal friendship with Him. Yet your sin has separated you from God and His loving plan for you.) Believe that Jesus died to pay for your personal sins as well as all the sins of mankind when He died on the cross and then He rose from the dead to prove He was God's Son. Then invite Jesus into your life to be both your Savior from your sins but also the new Lord over your life. Through this opening of your life to Jesus, you will be receiving God's grace into your life. The Bible calls this being born-again. This is what is essential to being ready for Christ's second coming - and truly ready to live the life of spiritual abundance God intended for you to live in this life now.*)

Here is a brief list of the clear teachings of the end times we observe in Matthew 24:

1) The end times began in Jesus' time, after His death on the cross. Jesus spoke of the end times in this passage to His disciples to give them hope and guidance through the end times.

2) The end times will be a time of general hardship, persecution and tribulation on many levels. These signal that Jesus' second coming is immanent but not immediate. These trials, including the destruction of Jerusalem, will begin during the lifetime of those who were Jesus' contemporaries. The hearts of many will grow cold and engage in lawlessness during this time as their love for anything or anyone other than themselves wane.

3) Many false teachers and prophets will arise. Many will perform incredible miracles to mislead the masses from Christ. Those who are saved will recognize these false "christs" and not follow them.

4) Jesus will physically return to earth. His coming will be at a time when no one

expected it or predicted it to happen. It will be a public not a hidden event. People will be engaging in normal activities of life until the moment Christ returns. When Christ returns, everyone in the world will realize that it is happening while it is happening. His return signals the rapture of His believers and the judgment on the remaining lost world.

5) Jesus gave these warnings so that people would be ready for His return. They would be saved and living the life of grace and love that His children have been created to live.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?