

SOON



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Be Ready!

From the first days of the church until now, every generation has wanted to know when the end will come. When will Jesus return? Will there be signs? How should we get ready?

The disciples pose these very questions to Jesus in Matthew 24-25 during His final week on earth. Jesus presents them (and us) with **signs**, **tensions**, and a call to **readiness**. Jesus does not focus on giving us every detail of what is to come, but He gives a clear call to action and to conduct befitting a disciple awaiting His return.

Jesus teaches them about **signs** that will be like birth pains, but these will **not yet** be the end (24:4-8). He also teaches that there will be other signs that are **near** the end (24:9-14). Following the signs, the Great Tribulation will begin followed by Jesus' return... **The End** (24:15-31).

Many would prefer that Jesus gives us a particular time and date for His return. Instead, Jesus presents us with **tensions** that we must hold in balance. We are to pay attention to the signs of the times, but no one will know exactly when Jesus will return. Jesus gives us things to look for, but blows up the idea of creating a timeline—"the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will" (24:22). We long for His coming while knowing there will be incredible persecution, turmoil, and tribulation. While we look for His return, many false christs will attempt to draw us away. So we wait with great excitement and anticipation while also being wise and discerning. We've been shown the puzzle pieces, but we can't quite see how they will all fit together.

The Christian lives in **readiness** for the return of Christ, but never knowing if it will happen in their lifetime. Through parables and direct command, Jesus holds His disciples to a standard of preparedness for the moment of His return. Our lives are filled with faith, anticipation, and even suspense as we watch the **Final Day** draw ever closer in these **Last Days**. Readiness is not standing on a rooftop with our hands extended or looking to the skies. We learn that readiness is caring for the thirsty, the hungry, the stranger, and the hurting (25:34-46). **We prepare for the return of Jesus by loving those around us who need our help.**

Historical Context

In Matthew 24-25, Jesus was in the last week of His life in Jerusalem (Passion Week). He spent much of the week in the Temple debating and correcting the religious leaders.

Jesus cleared the temple with force (Matthew 21:12-17), debated the Priests, Elders, and Sadducees (21:23-22:46), publicly disgraced the religious leaders (23:1-12), and pronounced woes over them (23:13-35). Immediately before the Olivet Discourse, Jesus pronounced judgment and desolation over Jerusalem and the temple.

Jesus exited the temple and walked to the Mount of Olives for one of His last public discourses. Based upon the comments of the disciples, the temple was the starting point for Jesus' discussion of the signs of the end times. The temple is considered one of the most beautiful buildings in the known world. Josephus (a first century Roman-Jewish historian) described the temple as being made up of huge stones (some 40 feet long) adorned with pure white marble and gold plates. It would nearly blind onlookers in the daylight (Josephus, J. W. 6.267).

There is still lively debate as to which aspects of this passage have already taken place and which are yet to come. The destruction of the temple plays a huge role in this discussion.

The temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. along with much of Jerusalem. The pronouncement of the destruction of Jerusalem, made by Jesus at the end of chapter 23, took place within the first generation of believers. The signs of the end times began almost immediately.

Literary Context

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels. They have a lot of information in common, shared from different perspectives. The parallel passages to Matthew 24-25 are Mark 12 and Luke 17 & 21. These passages can give the reader a deeper and fuller understanding of the Olivet Discourse.

After leaving the temple and while sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples ask Jesus two questions (24:3):

When will these things happen (the destruction of the temple)?

What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?

The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25) is basically Jesus answering these questions.

Matthew 24-25 has a combination of genres, making it difficult to interpret with certainty. This passage uses parables, which are stories with a punchline designed to provoke emotion and move one to action. In addition to parables, there is a blend of prophetic and apocalyptic material in a narrative framework. **Prophetic** is often forthtelling (judgment and truth for the immediate audience) and at times foretelling (what is to come in the future). **Apocalyptic** literature will use symbolism ("the seven stars, the seven golden lamp stands" in Revelation 1:20 and "the stars will fall from the sky" in Matthew 24:29) and metaphor. **Narrative** will often describe what happened, but does not necessarily prescribe what should have happened or what should happen in the future. Narratives are not designed to answer all of our theological questions.

Scope of the Study Guide

The primary goal of this guide is to walk through the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24-25, to bring some clarity to the passage, and to present differing viewpoints concerning the primary passage (especially in the *Further Study* sections). The end times will **not** be discussed as a whole, nor will there be an in-depth study of other passages discussing the end times. Several resources for the end times will be listed along the way and at the end.

Using the Study Guide

Our study guides are created to help us *Be in the Bible*. They are guided studies through a book or passage to help the reader **interact** with the text, **interpret** it, and correctly **apply** it.

Each section will include interacting with the text geared toward slowing us down so we can recognize and understand the key points and emphasis of each section. Following each passage, several questions are designed to help us understand and apply the content. They can be answered either during your personal devotion time or with your group. *Further Study* sections (which are marked by the bracketed numbers within the text) are provided for verses and concepts that are more difficult. Recommended resources are in the back if you would like to study any of these topics further. Enjoy!

MATTHEW 24:1-14 (CSB)

Interact With the Text

- Give each section a descriptive title. (There are 3 for this reading).
- Underline any commands given.
- Bracket the “birth pains.”
- Circle the things that will happen to believers.

(title)

¹ As Jesus left and was going out of the temple, His disciples came up and called His attention to its buildings. ² He replied to them, “Do you see all these things? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down.”

³ While He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached Him privately and said, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what is the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

(title)

⁴ Jesus replied to them, “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and they will deceive many. ⁶ You are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, because these things must take

place, but **the end is not yet.** ⁷ For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

⁸ All these events are the beginning of labor pains.

(title)

⁹ “Then they will hand you over to be persecuted, and they will kill you. You will be **hated by all nations because of My name [1].** ¹⁰ Then many will fall away, betray one another, and hate one another. ¹¹ Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

¹² Because lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But **the one who endures [2]** to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Interpreting & Applying the Text

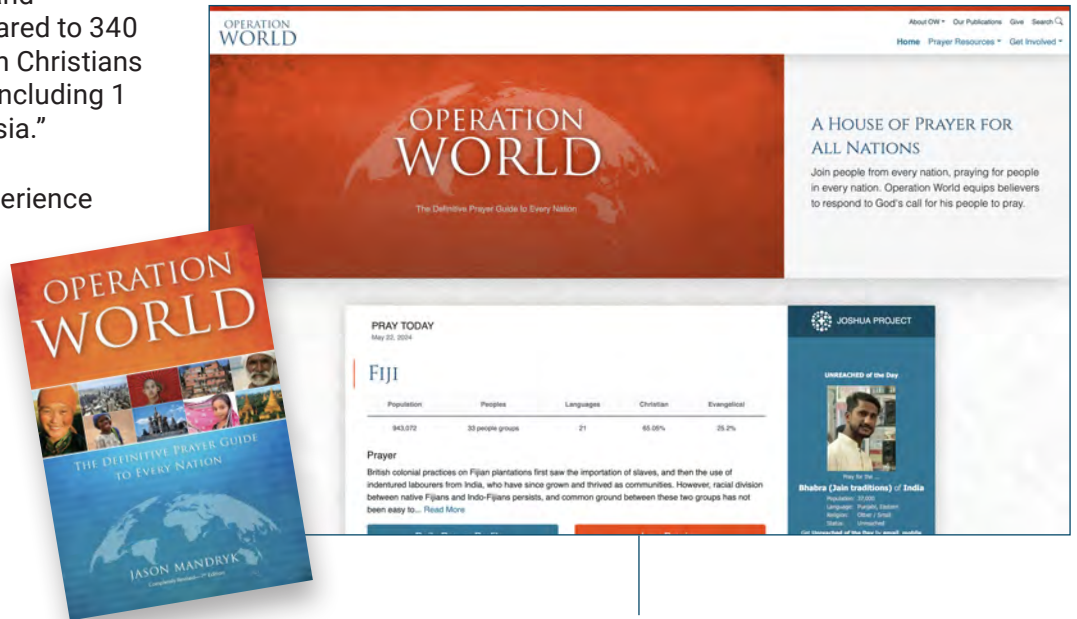
1. When and where does this discussion and discourse take place? What are the questions Jesus is answering?
2. Which events in verses 4-8 do you see happening around us today?
3. The statement, "I am the Messiah," can take many forms. How does our world and culture try to promote happiness, satisfaction, and meaning through false saviors?
4. How are we to respond to the events in verses 4-8? Why is it important to remember Jesus' descriptions of these events as **"the end is not yet"** (24:6)?
5. As you circled all the things that will happen to Christians, how will you prepare yourself for such persecution and hardship? How can we support brothers and sisters in Christ who are presently experiencing this persecution?
6. How is "the end" connected to the Great Commission? What does this tell us about the importance and primacy of the Gospel going to all nations? How can we better live out this priority?

Further Study

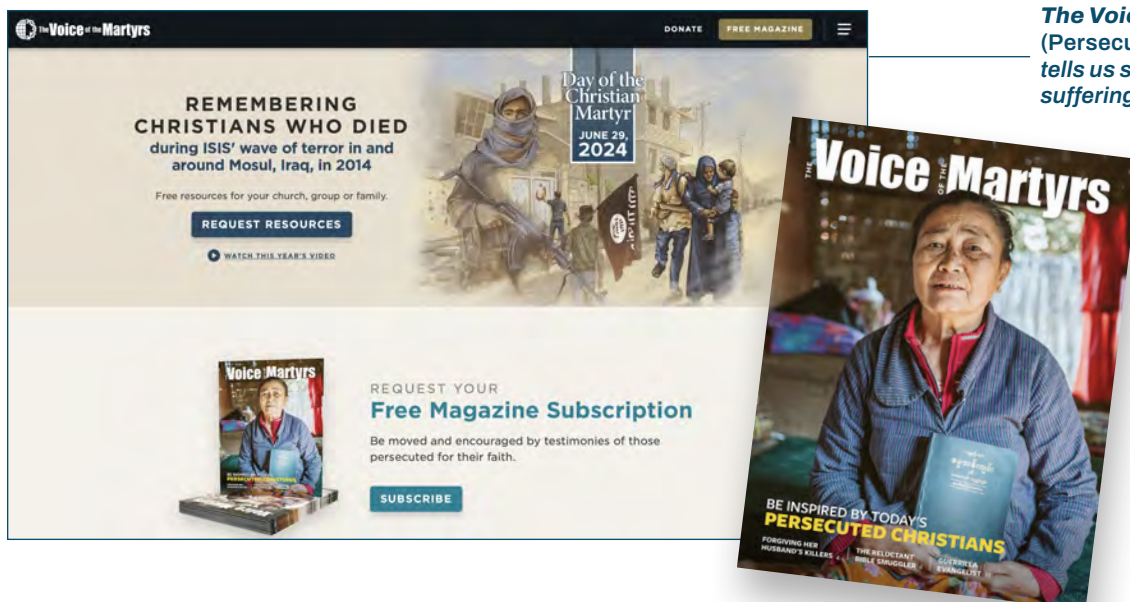
[1] Persecution is taking place around the world. Statistically, persecution is most extreme in the countries of North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Eritrea, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, among others. *Christianity Today* reports, "Every day, 13 Christians worldwide are killed because of their faith. Every day, 12 churches or Christian buildings are attacked. And every day, 12 Christians are unjustly arrested or imprisoned, and another 5 are abducted."

According to the *Religious Persecution and World Wide Watch List*, the report for 2023 said that "Around 365 million Christians are subject to 'high levels of persecution and discrimination.'" This compared to 340 million in 2021. One in seven Christians are persecuted worldwide, including 1 in 5 in Africa and 1 in 7 in Asia."

The American Christian experience is very different from the worldwide experience. Brothers and sisters are suffering everywhere! They would look at these signs of the times and fully believe the sign of persecution is in full effect.



The book and website (OperationWorld.org) of Operation World is devoted to giving us an updated guide on how to pray for each country.



The Voice of the Martyrs website (Persecution.com) and magazine tells us stories of those who are suffering.

As fellow Christians, we should be aware, we should pray, and we should help as much as possible.

[2] ***"The one who endures"***—does this then mean that there will be true believers who fall away and are eternally lost in these days?

Matthew 24:24 seems to answer this question: "For false messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders to lead astray, ***if possible***, even the elect." The connotation here is that the elect cannot fall away, but it is impressive how convincing these false christs will be. Our salvation is ultimately placed in the faithfulness of Jesus, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, and the eternal gift of salvation that is permanently given to those who believe.

A few additional verses on the subject:

- John 1:12, 3:16 — fully children of God and saved at the moment of salvation.
- Ephesians 1:4-10 — in Christ we are already chosen, blameless, holy, and sealed with the Spirit.
- Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13 — though we are called to obedience and action, it is ultimately God who secures our salvation and sanctification.

MATTHEW 24:15-31

Interact With the Text

- Give each section a descriptive title.
- Put parentheses around the ways people should respond when they see “the abomination of desolation.”
- Put brackets around everything you learn about the “elect.”
- Underline everything that is taught about the return of Jesus.

¹⁵ “So when you see the **abomination of desolation** [3], spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place” (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ “then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ A man on the housetop must not come down to get things out of his house, ¹⁸ and a man in the field must not go back to get his coat. ¹⁹ Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your escape may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For at that time there will be **great distress** [4], the kind that hasn’t taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again. ²² Unless those days were cut short, no one would be saved. But those days will be cut short because of the elect [5].

²³ “If anyone tells you then, ‘See, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Over here!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

²⁵ Take note: I have told you in advance. ²⁶ So if they tell you, ‘See, he’s in the wilderness!’ don’t go out; or, ‘See, he’s in the storerooms!’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the Coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the carcass is, there the vultures will gather.

²⁹ “Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”

Interpreting & Applying the Text

1. At the beginning of the chapter, we are warned about false christs. The intensity increases at the end as they now “perform great signs and wonders” (24:24). With such great shows of power, how can we distinguish between a false christ and Jesus (1 John 2:22 & 4:3 are helpful)?
2. According to this passage, should the elect (Christians) be prepared to suffer? Will they suffer along with everyone else?
3. How do we prepare ourselves for suffering and persecution?
4. What do we learn about the Second Coming of Jesus in this passage?
5. How do we determine if Jesus is speaking figuratively, literally, or a little of both in 24:29-31? Can you point to times when Jesus speaks figuratively in simile, metaphor, hyperbole, imagery, or story?

Further Study

[3] The **abomination of desolation** is a key moment in time. It is first recorded in Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 and these verses were likely referring to Antiochus IV, the Syrian king who slaughtered a pig on the altar of burnt offering and erected an idol of Olympian Zeus on the altar in the temple in 167 B.C. (1 Maccabees 1:54; 2 Maccabees 6:1-5, 8:17; Josephus, ant. 18.3.1; 18.8.2-9).

Even though the Antiochus event was significant, there is clearly fulfillment yet to come according to Jesus' words. The abomination of desolation referred to by Jesus will be an event that is felt worldwide, though smaller versions of that may take place along the way. After Jesus, the Zealots went into the Most Holy Place and desecrated it just before Titus laid siege to the city. Titus then brought the Roman standards bearing the image of Caesar into Jerusalem. Vespasian's equestrian statue was erected in the Most Holy Place (Jerome); a statue of Titus was erected on the site of the ruined temple (Chrysostom) (Osborne, 883).

The abomination of desolation likely has some relation to the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 and to the Antichrist figure of Revelation 6 and 13. The abomination of desolation is not given a particular set time-frame, but the return of Christ appears to come very quickly after the events of the abomination of desolation.

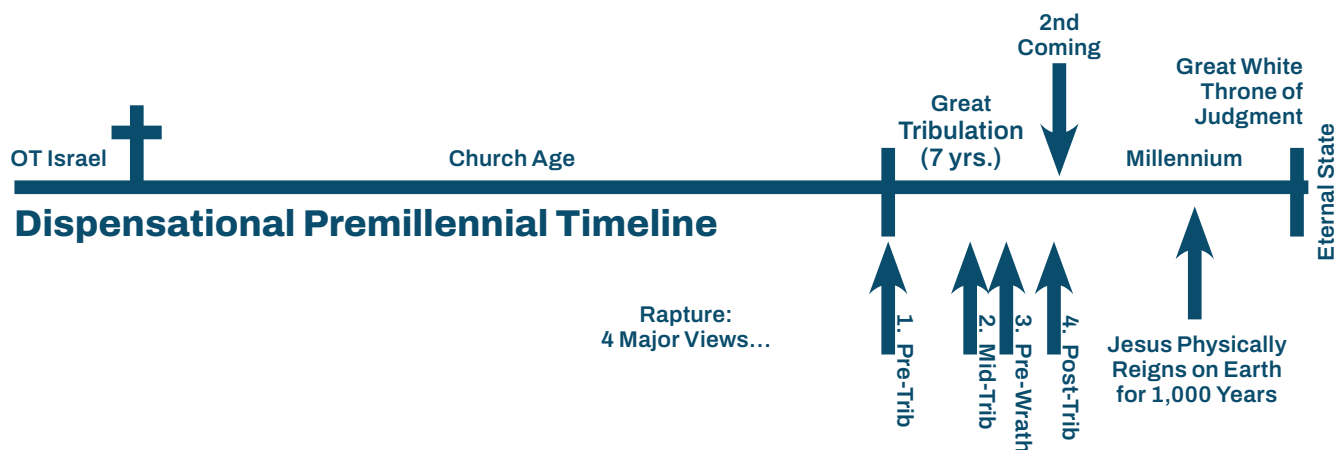
[4] The "**great distress**" discussed is described as the worst tribulation that the world has or will ever see and experience (24:20-21). The phrase "no one would be saved" (CSB) is translated "not a single person will survive" in the NLT (24:21). This verse speaks to the incredible intensity and devastation of this period. This time of tribulation is equated to the **Great Tribulation** of Revelation 7:14.

[5] Will the elect (Christians) go through this tribulation? Based upon Christ's description, this tribulation (great stress) that occurs before His return seems consistent with the Great Tribulation of Revelation 7:14. Answering this question is tricky.

Dispensational Pretribulation Premillennial Position

If Revelation is treated as a timeline (in which we try to fit the events of Matthew 24-25), Christians would be raptured by Christ **before** the Great Tribulation. The “elect” mentioned in Matthew 24-25 would likely be those who receive Jesus during the Tribulation. Jesus raptures believers before the Tribulation and then returns (with those believers) after the Tribulation to defeat the Antichrist (man of lawlessness / the abomination of desolation). One could possibly point to Matthew 24:40-41 as a picture of the rapture before the Great Tribulation.

Signs of the End of the Age → Rapture → Great Tribulation → 2nd Coming



Historic Premillennial Position

Beginning with the words of Jesus in Matthew 24-25, it is argued that the most natural reading is that Christians will go through this tribulation and are then gathered at the end (24:31). Jesus’ emphasis of “be ready” seems to include being ready for the distress of the tribulation. In this position, the apocalyptic book of Revelation is not considered a detailed timeline (but is considered more figurative, symbolic, and likely recursive in its teaching and structure) that shapes Matthew 24-25. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 describes the timing of Christ’s coming: “for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed...whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming” (2 Thessalonians 2:3 & 8).

Signs of the End of the Age → Great Tribulation → Rapture & 2nd Coming



Suggested Posture

“For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour **when you do not think He will**” (Matthew 24:44). Jesus gives us details of the signs that are **not the end** and then signs **near the end**. Nevertheless, we will not know. In fact, He will come at a time that we do not expect. This will be an area of disagreement and speculation until He comes. The command is not to “guess the right sequence of events,” but to **“be ready.”** It would be to every believer’s benefit to look forward to the coming of the Lord **and** to be prepared for difficult times.

MATTHEW 24:32-51

Interact With the Text

- Give each section a descriptive title.
- Underline everything that teaches us about the timing of His Return.
- Circle every time Jesus describes how we are to prepare for His Return.

³² “Learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ In the same way, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near—at the door. ³⁴ Truly I tell you, **this generation [6]** will certainly not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.

³⁶ “Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—**except the Father alone [7]**. ³⁷ As the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. ³⁸ For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark. ³⁹ They didn’t know until the flood came and swept them all away. This is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore be alert, since you don’t know

what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this: If the homeowner had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ This is why you are also to **be ready**, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

⁴⁵ “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom the master finds doing his job when he comes. ⁴⁷ Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But if that wicked servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delayed,’ ⁴⁹ and starts to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰ that servant’s master will come on a day he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Interpreting & Applying the Text

1. How would you put the lesson of the fig tree into your own words?
2. Why would Jesus give us signs of His return, but also tell us He will come “on a day [we do] **not** expect Him and at an hour [we do] not know” (24:50)?
3. What point is Jesus making from His example of “the days of Noah?”
4. What does it look like for a Christian to “be ready,” “be on the alert,” and be “doing his/her job?”
5. What are your next steps for being more prepared and ready for the return of Christ?

Further Study

[6] When does all this happen? Is it a reference to the first generation of Christians, the generation alive when Christ returns, or all generations? Perhaps the most appropriate answer is “yes” to all these questions...

- **Entirely Future** — Classic dispensationalists view this passage as entirely future. “This generation” is the final generation that is raptured before the Great Tribulation (Schlatter, Zahn, Gnika).
- **Entirely Political** — Others view the whole as political, referring to the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus’ return is a return for His exiled people after the destruction. The “shaking heavens” symbolize the political disasters to come (France, Wright, McKnight).
- **Political and Future** — Others believe 24:4-28 refers only to the destruction of the temple, 24:29-31 is discussing the future return of Christ, and 24:32-35 teaches about the Great Tribulation to come (Wenham, Gnika, Carson).
- **Interconnected Present and Future** — The language is apocalyptic and the destruction of Jerusalem foreshadows the tribulation period and the future return of Christ (Hill, Ladd, Gundry, Turner, Davies, Wilkins), (Osborne, 865).

Regardless of the position you choose and hold, it seems clear that Jesus expects every believer of every generation to live in expectation and readiness of His return.

[7] If Jesus does not know the date, does this mean that He is less than all-knowing and therefore less than fully God?

In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul teaches that Jesus emptied Himself and took the form of a servant and was found in the likeness of man. There has been some debate in recent years about these verses. Some have falsely proposed that Jesus gave up (even lost) His deity. Grudem strongly states, “No recognized teacher in the first 1,800 years of church history, including those who were native speakers of Greek, thought that ‘emptied Himself’ in Philippians 2:7 meant that the Son of God gave up some of His divine attributes” (Grudem, 550).

Throughout the Gospels. Jesus is called the “Son of God.” He is called “Lord” throughout the New Testament and receives worship and praise now and forever (Hebrews 1:6, Revelation 5). Jesus was, is, and forever will be fully God (Revelation 1:8). Even on earth, Jesus is considered fully God.








While on earth, Jesus voluntarily and temporarily set aside His full splendor and majesty by taking on the form of a servant. Jesus lived His life dependent on the Father and Holy Spirit just like we do. Though being fully God, Jesus lived in a human body and lived within the parameters of that body (hunger, need to sleep, capable of physical pain and death...). During that time He lived dependent upon His Father and in subordination to Him (Matthew 11:27; 2:23; John 5:19, 21-23). “When walking planet earth, He was not omnipresent and limited Himself in His omnipotence and omniscience” (Osborn, 904). Jesus was never less than God even though He chose to live in a limited way and dependent upon the Father while on earth.

The following chart (pg. 15) represents the view that Revelation does not function as a timeline, but as a message taught seven times. This method of interpretation views the book as more symbolic and circular than literal and linear.

Revelation: Seven Sequences of Seven








Prologue: Vision of Jesus Christ among the candlesticks [1]

1. Seven Letters to the Churches [2 & 3]

2:1-7 Ephesus 	2:8-11 Smyrna 	2:12-17 Pergamum 	2:18-29 Thyatira 	3:1-6 Sardis 	3:7-13 Philadelphia 	3:14-22 Laodicea 
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Introduction: The Lamb is worthy to open the seals [4 & 5]

The First Scroll

2:28-30 White horse: conqueror 	6:3-4 Red horse: war 	6:5-6 Black horse: famine & oppression 	6:7-8 Pale horse: death by sword, famine & disease 	6:9-11 Prayers of the Martyrs 	6:12-7:17 Day of Wrath has come, 144,000 sealed 	8:1 long pause 
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3. Seven Trumpets [8:2-11] Prologue [8:2-6] Offering up of the prayers of the faithful

8:7 Earth damaged 	8:8-9 Sea damaged 	8:10-11 Rivers damaged 	8:12 Sun damaged 	8:13-9:12 Abyss unlocked: darkness & pain 	13:11-14 Demonic army from Euphrates 7 thunders 2nd scroll The Two Witnesses Great Battle 	11:15-19 The time has come for dead to be judged. Great hailstorm 
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4. Seven Visions of Warfare [12-14]








The Second Scroll

12:1-2 Woman with crown of 12 stars 	12:3-6 Huge Red Dragon 	12:7-18 War in heaven: Dragon thrown down to earth 	13:1-10 Beast from the sea 	13:11-18 Beast from the land (False Prophet) 	14:1-13 the Lamb with the 144,000. The hour of judgement has arrived 	14:14-20 Judgement begins 
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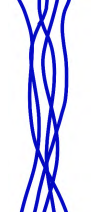
5. Seven Final Plagues [15-16] Prologue [15:1-16:1] Offering up of the worship of the faithful

16:2 Earth plague 	16:3 Sea plague 	16:4-7 River plague 	16:8-9 Sun plague 	16:10-11 Throne of beast: darkness & pain 	16:12-16 Demonic army from Euphrates. Great Battle 	16:17-21 Start of judgement. Great hailstorm 
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6. Seven Visions of Victory [17-19]

17 The Great Prostitute (Babylon) 	18 The Fall of Babylon 	19:1-5 Vast throng in heaven praise God for judgements 	19:6-10 Vast throng in heaven announce the wedding of the Lamb 	19:11-16 Christ appears with army dressed in white 	19:17-18 Announcement of battle 	19:19-21 Great battle: Beast and False Prophet thrown into lake of fire 
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7. Seven Visions of the End of the Age and the New Creation [20-22:5]

20:1-6 The Dragon: subdued for 1000 years 	20:7-10 The Dragon: released, fights, and is thrown into lake of fire 	20:11-15 Great white throne. The dead are judged 	21:1 A new heaven and a new earth 	21:2-8 A bride adorned for her husband. "Behold, I am making all things new!" 	21:9-27 The beauty of the city (the wife of the Lamb) 	22:1-5 The River of Life 
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Epilogue [22:6-21] I am coming soon!

(Andrew Fountain © 2019-07-30)

MATTHEW 25:1-28

Interact With the Text

- Give each section a descriptive title
- Underline examples we **are** to follow.
- Bracket examples of how we **are not** to live.

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ When the foolish took their lamps, they didn't take oil with them; ⁴ but the wise ones took oil in their flasks with their lamps. ⁵ When the groom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ "In the middle of the night there was a shout: 'Here's the groom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷ "Then all the virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.' ⁹ "The wise ones answered, 'No, there won't be enough for us and for you. Go instead to those who sell oil, and buy some for yourselves.'

¹⁰ "When they had gone to buy some, the groom arrived, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Later the rest of the virgins also came and said, 'Master, master, open up for us!' ¹² "He replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you!' ¹³ "Therefore be alert, because you don't know either the day or the hour.

¹⁴ "For it is just like a man about to go on a journey. He called his own servants and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents [refers to a considerable sum of money], to another two talents, and to another one talent, depending on each one's ability. Then he went on a journey. Immediately ¹⁶ the man who had received five talents went, put them to work, and earned five more. ¹⁷ In the same way the man with two earned two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five talents approached, presented five more talents, and said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I've earned five more talents.'

²¹ "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy.'

²² "The man with two talents also approached. He said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I've earned two more talents.'

²³ "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy.'

²⁴ "The man who had received one talent also approached and said, 'Master, I know you. You're a harsh man, reaping where you haven't sown and gathering where you haven't scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'

²⁶ "His master replied to him, 'You evil, lazy servant! If you knew that I reap where I haven't sown and gather where I haven't scattered, ²⁷ then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and I would have received my money back with interest when I returned.

²⁸ "'So take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ³⁰ And throw this good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Interpreting & Applying the Text

1. How did the wise virgins act differently than the foolish virgins?
2. In the second parable, why did each receive a different number of talents (sum of money) from the master?
3. What did the master expect while he was gone?
4. What was the mistake that the third servant made?
5. This parable does not speak to salvation. It is emphasizing the importance of using what God has given us for His Kingdom. What are some things in your life (more than just your money) that you believe God wants you to use to expand His Kingdom?

MATTHEW 25:31-46

Interact With the Text

- Give this section a descriptive title.
- Underline in blue everything you learn about the sheep.
- Underline in red everything you learn about the goats.

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on the left.

³⁴ Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father; inherit the **kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

³⁵ “‘For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or without clothes and clothe You? ³⁹ When did we see You sick, or in prison, and visit You?’

⁴⁰ “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.’

⁴¹ “Then He will also say to those on the left, ‘Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger and you didn’t take Me in; I was naked and you didn’t clothe Me, sick and in prison and you didn’t take care of Me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they too will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison, and not help You?’

⁴⁵ “Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.’

⁴⁶ “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Interpreting & Applying the Text

1. Summarize what happens when Jesus returns.
2. What do we learn about the **kingdom** (25:34)?
3. We are saved by faith alone, and saving faith leads to a transformed life. In verses 35-40, we are transformed from the inside out as we grow in our love for God, each other, and our neighbors. What does Jesus teach us about how we should live?
4. How would your life change if you truly viewed “the least of these” as Jesus did? What if you viewed “the least of these” as being Jesus Himself?
5. The biblical understanding of hell and eternal punishment is under attack. What does Jesus teach us about eternal punishment? What would you say to someone who believes everyone eventually makes it to heaven?

Popular Methods of Interpreting the End Times

Several methods of interpreting Revelation have been suggested and used through the centuries. Some lean towards it being entirely symbolic, while others view it as a timeline of detailed literal events. Some view it as entirely future (dispensationalists), others view it as primarily fulfilled in the past (preterists), and others describe it as speaking to the entire church age, past, present, and future (historicists).

Preterist

Holds that many of the Old Testament prophecies are already fulfilled by the events of 66-70 A.D. in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple or soon thereafter. Therefore, they put the date of the events in Revelation as before the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. The book was primarily written to the audience that received it.

Historicist

Revelation speaks to the entire church age, past, present, and future historical events. Tribulation is seen throughout church history, even in many places today. The church is growing in impact and Christ's Kingdom is also growing and expanding. Revelation is viewed with a newspaper approach—leading to large scale disagreement over events and fulfillment.

Idealist

Here, symbols do not relate to historical events. They are timeless spiritual truths. Pictures of judgment reference God's judgment on sinners at all times in the world. The victory of Christ is seen through the ages. The beast refers to all anti-Christian empires at all times in church history. The millennium is not a future event, but the final cycle of the book, describing the Church Age. Though the theology of this method may be consistent with Scripture as a whole, it disconnects Revelation from both history and the future.

Futuristic

Revelation, starting in chapter 4, is viewed as a discussion of the future. Revelation then outlines many things that are yet to come, at times literal, at times symbolic, and most everything is pointing towards the future. The futurist, at times, will push a hard-literal interpretation and create what seems to many a very forced and unintended outline of future events.

Eclectic

"Many scholars in the last few decades (Morris, Johnson, Geisen, Mounce, Beale) prefer to combine more than one of the views above" (Osborne, 21). "The solution is to allow preterist, idealist, and futurist methods to interact in such a way that the strengths are maximized and the weaknesses are minimized" (Ibid, 21).

No one can deny that there isn't some symbolism. Revelation begins by using symbolism and Revelation itself often identifies its own symbols. Stars represent angels (1:16, 20) (some would even say "angels" represent the pastors) and the lampstands represent churches (1:13, 20). The morning star (2:28) refers to Christ. The key of David (3:7) represents the power to open and close doors (Isaiah 22:22). The seven lamps of fire represent the Spirit of God (4:5), along with a large list of other symbols. The question is how much is symbolic and what is the nature and intent of the author and genre in the use of symbols.

Interpretations of Revelation

	Ch. 1-3	Ch. 4-19	Ch. 20-22
Preterist	Historic churches	Symbolic of contemporary conditions	Symbolic of heaven and victory
Idealist	Historic churches	Symbolic of conflict of good and evil	Victory of good
Historicist	Historic churches	Symbolic of events of history: fall of Rome, Mohammedanism, papacy, Reformation	Final judgment, millennium (?), eternal state
Futurist	Historic churches and/or 7 stages of church history	Future tribulation; concentrated judgments on apostate church & on Antichrist; coming of Christ	Millennial kingdom; judgment of wicked dead; eternal state

Popular Systems of Interpretation

Covenant Theology

Many in this group lean more towards a heavy, symbolic hermeneutic in the book of Revelation. This is a system based around the progressive revelation of God and His redemptive plan through His covenant with His people (Adam, Noah, Abraham...). God's covenant is ultimately with those who believe, so no clear distinction is made between Israel and the Church. Covenant theologians do not view the Bible in distinct dispensations as much as the progressive growth of a single theme—the Redemptive Covenant of God. Deeper study can be done by reading O. Palmer Robertson, Geerhardus Vos, Louis Berkhof, Robert L. Reymond, or W. J. Dumbrell.

Dispensationalism

It is the premillennial system that uses a futurist interpretation of Revelation. The system describes God's redemptive plan as taking place through clear periods, administrations, or "dispensations." Each period includes new revelation and distinction from the previous (The Fall, The Law, The Coming of Christ...). Each dispensation may have distinct rules of interpretation. The clear lines of distinction between dispensations leads to a conclusion that Israel and the Church have a high level of distinction from one another—now and maybe even eternally. Further study can be done by reading the *Scofield Study Bible*, Walvoord, Pentecost, Theissen, or Ryrie. There are distinctions between Classical and Progressive Dispensationalism.

Classic Dispensationalism

This position describes a particular view of the end times developed by John Nelson Darby in the mid-19th century. It was popularized by the *Scofield Reference Bible*, and can be seen depicted fictionally in the *Left Behind* book and movie series. Clarifying characteristics include:

- Prophecies to Israel and to the Church need to be strictly distinct from one another.
- Old Testament prophecies concerning the Jews have been fulfilled or will be fulfilled for ethnic Jews in the future.
- The Church will be removed from the earth by a rapture (taken up to Christ) before the great tribulation begins.
- During this time, many Jews will receive Jesus as their Messiah.
- The appearance of the Antichrist will initiate the last phase of history.
- Jesus will return to earth and establish a literal 1,000-year reign before the Final Judgment and restoration.
- In the end, there are two peoples of God—Israel and the Church.

Theological Perspectives on Revelation

	Ch. 1-3	Ch. 4-19	Ch. 20-22
Post-millennial	Historic churches	Generally historicist	Symbolic of heaven and victory
Amillennial	Historic churches	Generally historicist	Coming of Christ; judgment; eternal state
Pre-millennial	Historic churches representative of historical stages	Generally futurist	Literal, millennial reign; judgment of great white throne; New Jerusalem
Apocalyptic	Historic churches	Generally preterist	Symbolic of heaven and victory

Progressive Dispensationalism

Now held by many theologians (Blaising, Bock).

- The kingdom of God is initiated at the First Coming of Christ and will consummated at His Second Coming.
- There is no sharp distinction between Israel and the Church—not necessarily two eternally distinct groups.
- Many Old Testament prophecies are partially fulfilled by the church, while there is a future for ethnic Israel.
- Jesus is sitting on "David's throne" and rules in the here-and-now, but His rule will be completely realized by all in the end. They hold to an "already, not yet" hermeneutic.

Recommended Resources

- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Fee & Stuart
- *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* by Fee & Stuart
- *Matthew, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* by Osborne
- *Matthew, NAC* by Bloomberg
- *Matthew, Pillar Commentaries* by Morris
- *Three Views on The Rapture* by Gundry & Hultberg
- *Three Views on The Millennium and Beyond* by Gundry & Bock
- *40 Questions About The End Times* by Eckhard Schnabel
- *Operation World* by Johnstone & Mandryk
- *Voice of the Martyrs* magazine & website (persecution.com)

Bibliography

- *Progressive Dispensationalism* by Blaising & Bock
- *The Millennium and Beyond* by Blaising, Gentry, Jr., and Strimple
- *How to Read & Understand The Biblical Prophets* by Gentry
- *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* by Grudem
- *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* by Morris
- *Revelation* by Osborne
- *New Covenant Theology* by Wells & Zaspel



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