

# TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

## 402 - An Overview Of Matthew 24

### 1. Introduction

Biblical prophecy can be clear and straightforward or it renders things in symbols, types or signs. A single passage can contain multiple prophecies represented by different elements all of which need to be carefully distinguished and clarified. Careful analysis is a must in order to accurately understand what a prophecy refers to and how it will be fulfilled.

### 2. The complexity of Matthew 24

I noted early in my introductory series that context is something that has to be understood, determined and preserved. I defined context in terms of the attributes that identify it. Interpretation of biblical prophecy is an area in which the context of passages, verses or entire books absolutely has to be identified and maintained. Failures to do this result in incorrect notions that will eventually become false doctrines. In the case of the end times or last days this is exactly what has taken place over the centuries.

A critical chapter used as a basis for ideas about the end times and the last days is **Matthew 24**. This is a chapter that requires great care to understand what's being revealed and how those things will be fulfilled. Taken at face value without understanding the nature of the prophecy leads some to blend various elements and then apply those to the end days as we've been discussing. In order to accurately understand **Matthew 24** we won't need to be an ancient language scholar or theologian. We just need to be a good critical reader. When we do that it's possible to identify the overall context of the chapter, individual elements and then appropriately group those elements and apply them to the events or conditions they pertain to. In this lesson I'll

- a. Review the background of what is taking place in Matthew 24
- b. Outline the chapter and group verses by individual elements
- c. Identify the nature of those elements
- d. Examine Christ's prophecies and their relative time frames

This isn't an impossible task. We'll have to take care to identify things correctly and associate the correct verses with other groups where appropriate. Let's start by reviewing the background context of Christ's statements.

### 3. The context of Matthew 24

**Matthew 23** is a scathing exposition by Christ of the Scribes and Pharisees hypocrisy. The opening of the chapter summarizes the entire discussion. "*Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their*

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*works: for they say, and do not.*” (Matt 23.1-3). From that point on Christ details the attitudes, practices and failures of the ruling religious class. This isn’t just a rebuke. Christ is calling out some of the most corrupt people in existence at the time. The problem is they had the Law of Moses and should have known and done better in teaching and practicing the law. God chose this time to send Christ into the world however as Paul states in **Galatians 4.4** because he knew these hypocrites were so entrenched in their own ideas that they’d kill Christ.

Although God knew what these people would do to his son, He didn’t make them do it. They had the ability to listen and repent but they didn’t. They had lost sight of spiritual things and the institutional Judaism of the first century appears to be a secularized control apparatus hiding behind a facade of religion and political manipulation. Christ would die at their hands because they hated what was good. They stood in opposition to God, so much so they were willing to kill the very Messiah they claimed to be looking for. There were exceptions as we know, but the majority of the leadership, and their influence defied all that was right.

Toward the end of **Matthew 23**, Christ mourns over Jerusalem. He knows what they’re going to do. He knows of the judgment coming against them for their evil and he laments the loss of the nation. Christ states, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”* (Matt 23.37-38).

As **Matthew 24** begins, Christ is leaving the temple and his disciples apparently wanted to tour the structure with him. The temple after all was an object of national pride and the center of Jewish authority. As they gathered Christ states, *“See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”* (Matt 24.2). When we connect the information at the end of the previous chapter the picture Christ paints for them is dark. They then travelled to the Mount of Olives and there his disciples, curious about Jesus declaration request clarification. They ask, *“Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”* (Matt 24.3). This request will define the context of Christ’s answer that he provides. First let’s take a look at the request itself.

In the text this is rendered in a single verse. I divide their request into three questions. Those are

- a. When shall these things be
- b. What shall be the sign of thy coming
- c. What shall be the sign ... of the end of the world

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The last two questions in the text are combined but logically we can see they're asking for a sign that will alert them of two events. One is Christ's return, and the second is the end of the world. Some render these as two questions and state them as ...

- a. When shall these things be
- b. What shall be the sign of the thy coming and of the end of the world

This is accurate but for the sake of clarity I like to separate these two items since it's apparent the disciples are treating them as separate events as well. The first part of the sentence "*what shall be the sign of ...*" is accurately applied to both "*thy coming*" and "*and of the end of the world.*" It's perfectly fine then to render these as

- a. When shall these things be
- b. What shall be the sign of thy coming
- c. What shall be the sign of the end of the world

By doing these we've isolated elements, identified them specifically and haven't damaged the overall meaning of the passage or the context.

So, we have Christ lamenting over the coming judgment against the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the future and the curiosity of the disciples who want to know when this will take place. That's the overall context and working within that framework we need to approach the text with these three questions in mind and identify what statements Christ makes that will answer each of them. And he does answer them.

The rest of the chapter provides the information the disciples have asked for. From our perspective the following verses present the evidence, in the form of the text, that we need to sift through, understand and then apply. That will start by sorting the verses by subject.

#### 4. Identifying & associating groups of verses

a. **Verses 4-5** - Christ warns the disciples of deceivers who will rise. Some will claim to be Christ and influence many.

b. **Verses 6-8** - Christ foretells of wars and rumors of war as nations rise against one another accompanied by famines, pestilence and earthquakes.

c. **Verses 9-14** - Speak of persecution that will rise against believers. Some will betray each other and many will be ashamed of Christ and forsake their faith. False prophets will rise, some will grow cold spiritually and others will endure faithfully. The Gospel will be preached

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throughout the world as a witness to all nations which will indicate the end.

d. **Verses 15-22** - Christ refers to a prophecy by Daniel, specifically that of the abomination of desolation that would stand in the Holy Place. Christ gives specific instructions as to what is to be done when this is seen and notes that for the sake of the faithful God would shorten those days to avoid complete annihilation.

e. **Verses 23-26** - are a warning about the rise of false Christ's and false prophets whose intent is to deceive and draw people away from the truth of the Gospel.

f. **Verse 27** - speaks specifically of the second coming. Christ declares that it will take place as fast as a lightning bolt flashing across the sky.

g. **Verse 28** - notes a sign of a "*carcase*" which will be the gathering place of eagles.

h. **Verse 29** - Tells of a time following an event in which the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give it's light and the stars would fall from the heavens as the powers of the heavens are shaken.

i. **Verses 30-31** - Describes the second coming as Christ will be seen in the clouds of heaven and the angels come forward to gather the saved, or elect, from the four winds.

j. **Verses 32-33** - Christ instructs the disciples to watch for the signs of what is to come and compares that to the growth cycle of a fig tree.

k. **Verses 34-35** - Christ states that the current generation would not pass until these things are fulfilled and adds that this is as sure as his word which would not pass away.

l. **Verses 36-39** - Christ speaks of the timing of his return comparing it to the days of Noah in which life went on as usual until the flood overwhelmed them all.

m. **Verses 40-41** - Christ makes a cryptic note of how would be working in the field. One would be taken while the other would not. Likewise two women will be working at a mill and one will be taken and the other not.

n. **Verses 42-44** - Christ addresses his return once more emphasizing the timing and the need for disciples to be vigilant and prepared at all times.

o. **Verses 45-51** - discusses the attitudes and behavior of the faithful and those who would be negligent spiritually. The faithful will remain active and prepared while others will take the

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time for granted, engage in sinful actions and be caught off guard by the Lord’s return. The outcomes of both are presented as the faithful will be saved and the unfaithful punished.

**5. The nature of the elements identified**

Ok. That’s a lot of information. We have to remember that this discourse answers all three questions. Now our task is to associate each of these verses or groups of verses with the questions and related event. This chart lists the verses we’ve outlined with a summary of their content.

	Verse /s	Event
a.	4-5	Deceivers / false Christs
b.	6-8	Wars / rumors of wars
c.	9-14	Persecution / betrayal / Gospel
d.	15-22	Abomination of desolation
e.	23-26	False Christs / false prophets
f.	27	Second coming / end
g.	28	Destruction of Jerusalem
h.	29	Sun / moon / stars / heavens shaken
i.	30-31	Second coming / end
j.	32-33	Fig tree / signs
k.	34-35	Generation not to pass
l.	36-39	Second coming / days of Noah
m.	40-41	One taken / other left
n.	42-44	Be vigilant / time not known
o.	45-51	Faithful / unfaithful / judgment

We can categorize the content into three main groups.

**Group 1:**

The first is a description Christ provides regarding developments in the world in general. This includes the preaching of the Gospel and reactions to it as well as complications that will arise. This group includes the rise of false Christ’s and deceivers in verses **4-5 & 23-26** , wars and conflicts in verses **6-8** and persecution against believers in verses **9-14**. These conditions are closely connected to the event described in the second group and will take place during the lifetime of those to whom Christ is speaking.

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**Group 2:**

The second group is a prophecy of a specific event in verses **15-22 & 28** marked by the sign of the “*abomination of desolation*” spoken of by Daniel. The result of this event is noted in verse **29** detailing its impact on political and social structures. Christ also notes that the disciples should be diligent in watching for specific signs preceding this event in verses **32-33** and adds a somewhat cryptic note about those who will heed these warnings in verses **40-41**. Once again I draw attention to Christ’s statement that all these things will be fulfilled during that generation in verses **34-35**.

**Group 3:**

As I noted earlier there are references to the second coming and therefore the end of the world. Verse **27** refers to the speed at which the second coming will take place, and verses **30-31** describe the appearance of Christ with his angels at the end. In verses **36-39** Christ states that only God knows when this will happen and compares that to the days of Noah in which the flood came on an unsuspecting population and destroyed them. In verses **42-44** Christ emphasizes the need for diligence since they won’t know when he will return. With that warning in place, Christ presents the characteristics of faithful and unfaithful servants in verses **45-51** and their fate in judgment.

Keep these groups in mind as we match them to the questions that were asked.

**Question 1: When shall these things be**

This is answered by the passages I have listed in group 1 & 2. The history of the first century was one of turmoil. After Christ ascended to the Father in **Acts 1**, the disciples waited until the day of Pentecost when the church is established. For some time the church flourishes until Stephen is killed in **Acts 7**. Saul, who later becomes the apostle Paul, mounts a persecution against the church and later even has letters to carry the persecution to Damascus in **Acts 9**. The Gospel continues to spread throughout the Gentile and Jewish world as Paul and others carry on the work of preaching.

In Palestine growing tensions rise bringing about more persecution against Christians as well as uprisings against the Romans. During this time, from roughly **33-34 A.D.** to around **68 A.D.** there are battles and the seeds of a growing rebellion that will be chronicled by historians such as Flavius Josephus in his account of the Jewish wars. False prophets will arise, as Christ stated, false letters will be written to confuse the faithful, as Paul notes but the Gospel will reach the entire world as Paul declares in **Colossians 1.23**. Judaizing teachers and Jewish mystics will seek to bind the Law of Moses on Gentile Christians and introduce gnostic writings and attempt

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to influence Christians in various areas. The epistle to the Colossians, written by Paul, addresses gnostic influences and false doctrines and John deals with the same thing in **1 John**. Paul warns of letters being circulated that were being presented as though authored by the apostle (**2 Thess 2.2**) spreading falsehood about the second coming.

Tiberius, the Roman emperor dies in 37 and is followed by Caligula and Nero, infamous figures in Roman history. Under Nero's reign Jews and Christians alike were being persecuted to a degree. Rome also saw rising tensions in Judea as well as problems in Britannia and other provinces. The peace that marked the early first century and had allowed the rapid spread of the Gospel was slowly eroding.

All of these things fit the statements made by Christ in **Matthew 24** that we can identify as describing cultural, political and religious changes taking place. Some of them would serve as signs and eventually the event that would result in not one stone being left on another would be clear by 68 A.D. as the Roman armies advance on Jerusalem. These events are all foretold by Christ and are indicated by the signs that Christ mentions.

Question 1 is therefore answered by the passages I've listed in groups 1 & 2. I'll cover this in more detail in the next lesson but the important thing here is that the changes and specific signs are all indicators of when this will happen. Those signs had definite characteristics and when the disciples saw them they were to take action. Those things would take place in their lifetime so there wasn't any need to look to the distant future for their fulfillment.

#### **Questions 2 & 3: What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world**

The second coming and end of the world as discussed in the last lesson and summarized here is one for which there is to be no sign. I have to emphasize that point. There will be no sign, warning, alert or anything to indicate the return of Christ and the end of the world. Anything that is noted as being a sign therefore cannot and does not refer to the second coming. The nature of the timing of that event is such that only God knows and since he's the only being that has that information it's absolutely impossible for humans to conclude, deduct, analyze, interpret or divine the time of the end. It can't be done. There's a hard limit God has set on the ability of humans to intrude into the things He alone knows. I'm reminded of Moses statement about this in his farewell address to the children of Israel. "*The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*" (Deut 29.29).

Anyone who offers an explanation of when the end will come or when Christ will appear is speaking from pure speculation. There are no codes, formulas, hidden texts or secret passages in the scriptures that will reveal this information. It's not there. I'm also reminded of the limits

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placed on what we can know as stated by Solomon. He writes that “...*he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.*” (Eccl 3.11).

It's beyond the sphere of human reasoning, thought, logic or consciousness to determine when Christ will return, or rather be sent back by God. In spite of that an entire industry exists that thrives on an endless stream of predictions and declarations of signs that are foreshadowing doom. All of those will fail, and as they fail, Bible believers who continue to voice these predictions will only remind the secular world of our ignorance and limitations causing them to view believers as naive, deluded or just plain crazy. Unfortunately there are some who prey on humanities fear of the end to take advantage of individuals for their gain. The remedy for that is the book that God gave us and all we have to do is read and understand it.

#### 6. Christ's prophecies and time frames

So, we have general conditions Christ describes that we can see coming about in the first century. We see that there are things that will take place within the lifetime of those listening to Christ in **Matthew 24**. We know that the second coming is known to no one but God himself. What we can conclude is that the majority of the prophecy Christ provides in **Matthew 24** was fulfilled before the end of the first century.

#### 7. Next

In the next lesson I'll focus on the events for which there are signs given in Matthew 24. I'll examine those and correlate them with prophecies from Daniel as noted by Christ. Join me in the next lesson for a discussion of **The Abomination Of Desolation**.