

## Week 28: Matthew 24

### Hook



#### **Main Point: Jesus will return.**

The phrase “spoiler warning” can be traced to the 1982 second Star Trek motion picture, *The Wrath of Khan*. The ending – spoiler warning – saw the death of one of the main characters and thus would cause outrage on the part of Trekkies who had the misfortune of hearing of the conclusion before being able to see the movie.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the phrase has become a part of the vernacular and an important tool in a time of instant information.

**Q: Have you ever had a book/game/television show/movie spoiled for you before you had the opportunity to experience it yourself?**

**Q: If you had the opportunity to have some event spoiled for you (to know the outcome in advance), what would it be? (examples include: your career trajectory, whom you will marry, the kind of adults your children will become).**

**Transition:** In today’s lesson, Jesus will give information on the most anticipated events in history – the Second Coming.

## Week 28: Matthew 24

### Book

**Main Point:** Jesus will return.

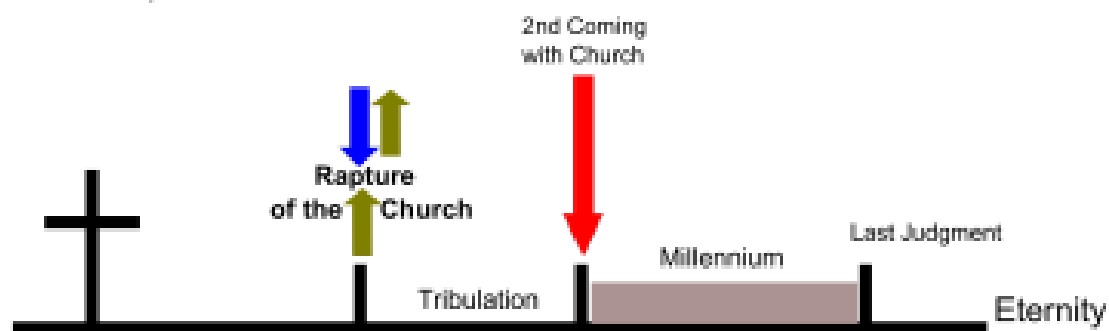
#### Matthew 24:1–14 [Read]

**Talking Point 1:** The first sign of the end times was the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

**Q: What did Jesus mean by “the beginning of the birth pains”?**

**Q: In what ways are Christians hated for the sake of the name of Jesus?**

Interpretations of this passage depend on one’s eschatological views (*eschatology* is theology of the end times). The eschatology of Prestonwood holds to a pre-Tribulation Rapture – the belief that faithful believers will be caught up together with Jesus in the sky *before* the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18). Then those who are left will go through seven years of tribulation, when the antichrist will rule (Revelation 6–19:10). At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will return in His Second Coming (Revelation 19:11–21), fight Satan and institute the Millennium – a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth while Satan is bound (Revelation 20:1–6). After the millennium, Satan is loosed and there is a final battle, where Satan is immediately defeated and thrown into hell forever (Revelation 20:7–10). Then will come the final judgment (Revelation 20:11–15) and the new heavens and new earth are created – the consummation of the kingdom of God (Revelation 21–22).



For more detail on the end-time views of Prestonwood views, watch this sermon from Pastor Jack Graham: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mGtjiayLI>)

It can be confusing because Jesus was talking about some “signs of the end of the age” that would be fulfilled in the *near* future, this first generation of the Church (v. 34), as well as some signs that would not happen until His Second Coming in the far future (v. 30). This was typical of biblical eschatological prophecy, to have both a near-future fulfillment and an eschatological-future fulfillment. For example, Daniel’s prophecies about the “abomination of desolation”

were fulfilled in 175 BC by the Greek ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who declared himself to be God manifest (“Epiphanes”), placed a statue of Zeus (the god he believed was manifest in his own being) in the temple, stole all of the sacred vessels, and sacrificed a pig on the altar. But there will also be a future Antichrist in the end times who will be another “abomination of desolation.” Most of the prophets foretold both near events – such as the Babylonian exile – and future events – such as the Day of the Lord, referring to the final judgment.

In Matthew 24, Jesus described both a near-future “sign of the end” – the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem – and a final “sign of the end” – His physical return in the clouds with power and glory, with angels and loud trumpets (v. 31). The destruction of the temple (Matthew 24:2) would be fulfilled in AD 70, but the Second Coming of Christ wouldn’t be until some unknown time in the distant future, after the Rapture and the Tribulation. The other signs described in this chapter happen either with the destruction of the temple or with His glorious return or in between. Many scholars recognize that these signs will happen over and over until Christ returns – things such as wars, false prophets, famines and earthquakes happen in every generation. This is one of the reasons that every generation has some believers who are convinced they are living in the end times.<sup>ii</sup> Jesus told them not to be alarmed when they saw these things happen, “for this must take place, but the end is not yet” (v. 6). These things are only “the beginning of the birth pains” (v. 8). These kinds of signs will happen in every generation, but the true end time will catch everyone off guard; no one knows the day or the hour. Jesus will return when we least expect it (vv. 27–31; 36–44).

The first sign of the end was the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (vv. 1–2), which happened in AD 70; Jesus was predicting it here. It happened about 40 years later, which is the biblical number for a generation (the length of time the Israelites had to wander for a generation to die off), so when Jesus said “these things” will take place before this generation passes away (v. 34), He was referring to the near-future fulfillment of the destruction of the temple.<sup>iii</sup>

Though Israel was not the largest or the greatest nation, the temple in Israel was larger and more magnificent than virtually any other temple of antiquity because they only had one temple for their one God, while the other nations had many temples for different gods.<sup>iv</sup> At the time of the exile in the Old Testament, even as they saw the northern kingdom fall to Assyria, the people of Judah thought they were invincible from takeover by a foreign power because they had God’s Spirit dwelling among them in the temple (Jeremiah 7:1–8). But Ezekiel saw a vision of God’s Spirit leaving the temple because His people only gave Him lip service; they didn’t actually live by His law of justice and righteousness (Ezekiel 10). God allowed the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem as a sign of His judgment against His people. Jesus was saying He was about to do it again.

The destruction of the temple in AD 70 was God’s judgment against the religious establishment of Jesus’ day. Like other Jews of their day, the disciples would have seen the destruction of the temple as a sign of the end of the age.<sup>v</sup>

Many of the other signs of Matthew 24:5–14 happened between Jesus’ ministry in AD 30 and the destruction of the temple in AD 70. False messiahs arose during this time and led people astray. There was great apostasy (vv. 4–5, 10–12). We see both of these in Acts and the epistles.<sup>vi</sup> A major famine struck in AD 46<sup>vii</sup> and massive earthquakes in AD 61 (v. 7).<sup>viii</sup> There were wars in AD 40 (v. 6).<sup>ix</sup> Nations rising up against nation describes the Jewish revolt against Rome in AD 66–73 (v. 7).<sup>x</sup> The disciples were persecuted and hated by all nations for His name’s sake and put to death (v. 9). All these things Jesus said were signs of the end, but only the beginning of the birth pains (v. 8). These kinds of things happen in every generation and will continue to happen until Jesus comes back.

But the one thing that will mark the true end is when the Gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed to every nation – *then* the end will come (v. 14).<sup>xi</sup> This is a motivation of many missionary groups, to evangelize every people group, because they believe it will hasten the Second Coming of Jesus. As Bible scholar Craig S. Keener writes, “The world controls many other factors, but this is the one factor that Jesus’ followers may determine: they must complete the commission of discipling all nations before the age will come to a close (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:6–11; Romans 11:25–26; 2 Peter 3:9–15).”<sup>xii</sup> This is the Great Commission, to make disciples of all nations. The kingdom will not come in all its fullness until all people have had the opportunity to embrace or reject Jesus as king. The disciples trusted that Jesus would return in His own timing because they believed, as God wrote in Scripture, that He was delaying His return so all people have a chance to repent (2 Peter 3:8–9). They didn’t believe that they could force Christ’s hand and make Him return, nor can we. But just as God’s promise to Israel was delayed because of their disobedience in the Old Testament, so Christ’s return is being delayed and the world’s suffering prolonged by the Church’s disobedience to the Great Commission.<sup>xiii</sup>

**Q: If this is true, why isn’t the Church putting more effort into evangelizing the world?**

**Q: Why is it hard or scary to share your faith? What makes it hard to do so all over the world?**

### **Matthew 24:15–33 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** No one knows *when* it will happen, but when Christ comes back, we will all know it *is* happening!

**Q: What do you think might happen during the days of Great Tribulation?**

**Q: How will we know Christ has come back?**

This section describes an “abomination of desolation” and a great tribulation and then the Second Coming of Christ. Again, some of this was fulfilled on the near-future level in that first generation with the destruction of the temple, but these things will happen again in the end times, and *that* time, Christ will return in the clouds.

“Abomination of desolation” refers to any time God’s sanctuary is defiled. In AD 66, the Romans shed the innocent blood of priests in the temple, which was a desecration. In AD 70, the temple was destroyed, and the Romans erected standards with images of their emperors on its ruins, a further desecration of the site.<sup>xiv</sup> During that time, those in Judea fled to the mountains (v. 16).<sup>xv</sup> Jesus’ advice to flee without going back to get your things is parallel to the fleeing of Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom. There was a time of great suffering and tribulation in Jerusalem during all those years of the revolts and attacks from Rome. Those who stayed in the city and did not flee suffered terribly. Jesus talked about how difficult it would be for a pregnant or nursing mother to flee (v. 19), and Josephus wrote of starving mothers eating their own children to survive during that time, which was consistent with the curses of the covenant in Deuteronomy and also happened when Jerusalem was attacked by Babylon before the exile.<sup>xvi</sup>

Another “abomination of desolation” will occur at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Some scholars believe all of verses 15–26 refer to the time of the destruction of the temple in AD 66–70. Others believe it refers both to that time and to a future time of tribulation.<sup>xvii</sup> Even though Jesus came and defeated death and evil on the Cross, we still live in a fallen world, and evil will continue until He comes again and the whole world is made new (Revelation 21:1–4).<sup>xviii</sup>

Jesus warned His disciples that during the time of tribulation, false prophets would arise and lead people astray (v. 24). People would even say Christ Himself had come back —“There He is! Go look in the wilderness, or look in the inner rooms” (vv. 23, 26). But Jesus warned us not to believe them. When He returns, we will know. The whole world will know. It will be unmistakable. The sun will go dark, the stars will fall from heaven – this imagery is from Isaiah’s oracle of the Day of the Lord found in Isaiah 13. Jesus will appear in glory and power coming on the clouds of heaven – this imagery is from Daniel’s vision in Daniel 7. A loud trumpet will sound, and angels will go out and gather the elect from all over the earth (vv. 29–31). The Second Coming of Christ will be like a double-edged sword, a Day of Judgment for the wicked, but vindication for the righteous. The nations will mourn His coming (v. 30), but the elect will be gathered up to Him in the clouds (v. 31).

Jesus used the fig tree as a lesson. Fig trees in Palestine lose their leaves seasonally, and they produce leaves before any other plants.<sup>xix</sup> When you see the sign of the fig tree, you know summer is near. In the same way, when you see these signs, you will know Jesus’ return is near. Christ’s Second Coming will not be a secret, quiet event. It will be earth-shattering. Everyone will see it; everyone will know it is happening.<sup>xx</sup> Jesus’ warning was not to fall for anyone who tells us He has already returned and is out in the wilderness somewhere or teaching in some church somewhere. When He comes back, we will know it!

**Q: Imagine what it would be like to see Jesus coming in the clouds in glory. How would you feel? How would you react?**

**Q: How does it make you feel to know that Christ will have His angels gather us up with Him?**

### **Matthew 24:34–51 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Though there are signs, no one knows when it will actually happen, so just be ready all the time!

Here Jesus made the application of all of His talk about the signs of the end times. The disciples asked for signs, and Jesus did give them some signs. And yet, so many of them are things that happen over and over again in each generation. All these signs, except for Christ's actual return, happened in their first generation – wars, famine, earthquakes, desecration, etc. And they will continue to happen in every generation until He comes back (34).

The only “sign” Jesus gave that isn't repeated in every generation is when the Gospel is proclaimed throughout the world to every nation (v. 14). Jesus told His disciples that *no one* knows the day or the hour He will return, not even Himself (v. 36)! So, instead of wasting your time obsessing over signs, get busy preaching the gospel. Get busy doing the work of the kingdom. Get busy fulfilling your mission.

When Jesus comes back, it will be just like the days of Noah. People will be going about their regular lives, with no idea that Jesus is about to come and judge the world. They won't be given a warning like Jonah gave to Nineveh that “you have 40 days to repent!” (Jonah 3:4). It will just happen one day, out of the blue, like a thief in the night. So we don't have any time to waste! We can't put off preaching the Gospel until a more convenient time, when we're not so busy or life isn't so crazy. Jesus may not come back for another 2,000 years or He may come tomorrow. We don't know. And that's the whole point. There is a reason God did it that way. Imagine if He had told them the day He was returning or if you knew the day you were going to die. How many people would live however they wanted and then wait until the day before to accept Christ and repent? How authentic of a faith would that be? But while we don't know the day Christ will return or the day we will die, we must live every day as if it's our last.

We must always be ready for Jesus to come back at any time (v. 44). That means living our lives for His glory and His kingdom, but it also means sharing the Gospel with everyone we can, working as hard as we can to fulfill the Great Commission. If you knew Jesus was coming back at the end of this week to judge the living and the dead, what would you spend the next seven days doing?

We are servants of the Master who have been left in charge of His kingdom while He is gone (v. 45). Jesus discussed this further in the next chapter, in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). Jesus has gone up to heaven, leaving His disciples with the mission to share the Gospel with all nations (Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:1–11). Our job is to expand His kingdom here on earth until He returns. Jesus said blessed is the one whom the Master will find feeding His people and caring for His kingdom (vv. 45–46). But the “servants” of the king who mistreat His people and spend their lives on their own pleasure, not building His kingdom because they believe “my Master is delayed,” will be thrown into hell with the rest of the hypocrites (vv. 48–51). Jesus' reference to “the hypocrites” reminds us of the religious leaders He criticized in the

previous chapter and the near-future judgment of the destruction of the temple, which was a punishment for their behavior. The truth is that some who call themselves servants of Christ will be just as unprepared for His Second Coming as those religious leaders were for His first coming.<sup>xxi</sup>

The only way to be ready is to just *always* be ready. We stay alert by always living in such a way that would cause us no shame if Jesus showed up right now. It is so easy for us to pursue so many different things in our lives, to invest our time and energy and money into many different pursuits. But the only thing that matters about our lives is whether we will hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The question we need to ask ourselves is, when Jesus comes back, what will He find me doing? How will He find me living?

**Q: If Jesus came back tomorrow, how would you feel about it and why?**

**Q: What things might you need to change about your life to always be ready for Jesus to return?**

**Q: In what ways is God leading you to do more to serve His people, build His kingdom, and fulfill the Great Commission?**

**Q: What things in your life might you need to let go of that are holding you back from fulfilling your mission as a servant of Christ?**

## **Week 28: Matthew 24**

### **Took**

**Main Point: Jesus will return.**

Although no one wants spoilers for movies, many do appreciate another feature of modern cinema – the run-time. Knowing how much time is left on a movie dictates when you might plan your snack run or bathroom break. Having a large, visible clock in a basketball or football gives the players a warning that it's time to make a move when the clock begins to run out. However, we know too well that we don't get a run-time or a game clock on for our lives. Christ's return (or our individual exit from this life) are unknowns. So the question is: Are you living your life with urgency?

**Q: If you knew that Christ was returning one year from now, how would you live differently?**

**Q: What steps have you taken to make sure that you're living a kingdom-driven life?**

**Q: How do you budget your time? Are there areas of life that are receiving too much of your time? How could you refocus this time on kingdom priorities?**

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** Imagine how you would feel if Jesus came back today. Would you feel joy at His presence and gratefulness for His grace? Or would you feel shame at all that you failed to do to serve Him and build His kingdom or all the time you wasted on your own pleasure when you could have been serving and even saving others? Jesus doesn't want you to feel guilty, but He does want you to examine your heart, your faith, and your life to see if you are really His follower and not just someone giving Him lip service.

**PRAY:** Take some time to ask God to really search your heart and expose the ways you are living that are not pleasing to Him. You can even pray the words of Psalm 139 to Him. Recommit your life to following Jesus, listening for His voice, and doing His will in your life.

**ACT:** Share the Gospel with at least one person this week. Think through the people in your life who are far from God and pray for an opportunity to share the Gospel in a way that is appealing and kind, not judgmental and condemning. We never know if it might be someone's last chance to hear the Gospel, because none of us is promised tomorrow, and Jesus could return at any moment. You don't want to regret not having shared the Gospel with those you love.



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- <sup>i</sup> <https://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/spoilers.htm>
- <sup>ii</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956).
- <sup>iii</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1999).
- <sup>iv</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BC-66 CE* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1992).
- <sup>v</sup> E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 1993).
- <sup>vi</sup> Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 2.444.
- <sup>vii</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3.320.
- <sup>viii</sup> J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977).
- <sup>ix</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991).
- <sup>x</sup> C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels, Library of Biblical Studies* (New York, NY: Ktav Publishing House, 1927).
- <sup>xi</sup> Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969).
- <sup>xii</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1999).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Desmond Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology* (Washington, DC: The University Press of America, 1979).
- <sup>xiv</sup> Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 4.147–201; 4.343; 5.17–18; 6.93.
- <sup>xv</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).
- <sup>xvi</sup> Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 6.208–212
- <sup>xvii</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1999).
- <sup>xviii</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew" *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).
- <sup>xix</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971).
- <sup>xx</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Vol 3* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997).
- <sup>xxi</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1999).