

Text: Matt 24:1-14

Title: Living in Anticipation of the End

Read: 24:1-3—‘When’ will the destruction of the temple occur, and ‘what’ will be the sign of the end of the age?

The disciples ask Jesus a question and Jesus gives the longest answer to any question in the entire NT.

- Commonly known as the Olivet Discourse—because Jesus was on the Mt of Olives when he spoke to his disciples
- This is the last of five major discourses by our Lord and it contains some of the most significant prophetic statements in all of Scripture.
- Chapter 24-25 of Matthew’s gospel has been the subject of much debate over many years, resulting in a variety of perspectives
- A very important passage as it predicts future events—it is found in all three synoptic gospel accounts—Matthew being the most extensive
- The most important teaching on end times for several reasons:
 - 1) it is the *Lord’s* exposition of future events given to his disciples during his time on earth,
 - 2) it outlines the future of Israel, a people at the center of much end-times theology,

In order to understand what’s going on in Matthew 24-25, we need to back up to chapter 23 and get a ‘running start.’ Christ’s prophetic message comes near the end of his earthly ministry. He has just given a scathing rebuke to the false religious leaders of Israel for their hypocrisy and failure to lead the people in God’s Word and ways.

- Jesus had commandeered the Temple, he was teaching and preaching when the temple officials confronted him and questioned his authority
- The confrontations only served to show and highlight Christ’s supreme authority and their inexcusable unbelief.
- Jesus gave one last public sermon, pronouncing judgment and warning his disciples and the crowds of the utter hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees
- Jesus has just said, following his pronouncement of woes upon the leaders, and his lament over Jerusalem—23:38-39—“Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord””

Jesus has just announced two things: 1) ‘your house is being left to you desolate’ (Jerusalem, and the Temple) 2) ‘you will not see me again, until you say...’

The two questions on the minds of the disciples are: 1) when will the Temple be destroyed? 2) How can we know ‘when will we see you again?’

So, their questions are a natural response to the statements Jesus just made.

- 24:4-41—Jesus tells them what they can expect
- 24:42-25:46—Jesus tells them how to live in anticipation of what they should expect—“Therefore, live like this...live in this way...this is how you should respond...”

- Jesus follows his didactic section with a call to live in a way consistent with that teaching—with a stress on faithfulness, being alert and ready, serving the Lord not knowing the hour of his return
- It is significant that Jesus spends half his time teaching and the other half explaining the implications of the teaching
- Jesus isn't merely answering a question but answering in a way that helps us with how we're to live
- Expl—If you don't pay attention because 'end-times' doesn't interest you—then, you're going to miss out on what God intends for you
- See: 1 John 3:1-3—teaching about the coming of Christ is connected to exhortation to live a pure life now

It is a monumental passage on end-times. At the same time, it is one of the most difficult to interpret. There's difficult and somewhat unfamiliar language, there's a mixture of prophetic and cataclysmic utterances, the chronology of events is difficult to determine, and there's no real consensus among commentators.

Instead of debating perspectives, let's walk through this passage verse-by-verse and understand what Jesus said, why he said it, and what the implications are for us.

By way of observation: There are twelve imperatives in this section: 'see to it...don't be frightened...don't be deceived...don't be misled...' (24:4,6,16,17,18,20,23,26,32,44).

- What that immediately tells us is that Jesus is not giving new information so that we can pin down a date of his return, but that there is a strong emphasis throughout (especially at the end of 24 and all of 25) of how we are to live in the present age

Jesus' primary aim is not merely to give us some 'Bible facts' but to encourage, aim, and exhort his disciples to right thinking and actions—to quicken us to readiness, action, perseverance, and discernment—'spiritual readiness and alertness in light of his return'

Like many prophetic passages in Scripture, Jesus doesn't give enough information so that we can go home and figure out a date as to his return—but instead he gives enough general details, enough predictive statements, so that we are motivated to holy living.

Why?—because God doesn't want us prognosticating about certain dates when he will return and set up his Kingdom, but to know certain truths and trust him and live holy lives in anticipation of his coming.

- 'The study of end times should motivate us to holy living.'
- 'Here's what you can expect—and, here's how to live'

Before we jump into these verses—

Four Major Interpretive Views:

Past View (Preterist)—the view that chapters 24-25 describe things that all took place in 70AD when Jerusalem falls—in other words, Jesus isn't answering the second question, 'what is the sign of your return?'

- Mainly covenantal theologians take this view of the discourse here

Partial-Preterist View—this view says that everything in Matthew 24:1-35 refers exclusively to the destruction of the Temple in 70AD, and the rest refers to the Coming of Christ. So, part is fulfilled, and part still coming.

Future View—that everything in chapters 24-25 are all future—they refer not to the church age but to the coming of Christ. In other words, Jesus answers the second question, ‘what is the sign of your return,’ but doesn’t answer the first question.

- This is the view of most dispensationalists

A Hybrid View—the Traditional Preterist-Futurist View—often called a ‘near and far’ view—there’s a near fulfillment that will prefigure a future fulfillment. In other words, I believe Jesus is answering both questions here simultaneously. He tells us some things that will take place throughout the church age, and he also tells us what the end will be like when Christ returns in glory. I view this discourse as describing both the events before and during the destruction of the temple as well as the last days before and during Christ’s return.¹

In 24:4-14—Jesus weaves together both predictive events or ‘signs’ with how the believer is to live in light of those events—he tells the disciples what they can expect and how they should respond throughout this section

1. The setting—the disciples are stunned.

24:1—“Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.”

- It is Wednesday of the Passion week
- Jesus leaves the Temple for the last time until He comes again—He abandons it—His departure has overtones of divine abandonment
- This is grievous for the disciples—this is hard for them to swallow—‘it’s one thing to clear out the money-changers—it’s a whole other issue to say you’re going to destroy their beloved temple’
- The result is there is no small confusion among the disciples about Christ and his Kingdom.

In the midst of their bewilderment, they called attention to the temple buildings that Herod had begun nearly fifty years earlier and wouldn’t complete until 64AD.

- When Herod the Great was appointed king over Israel, ruling on behalf of Rome, he sought the acceptance of the Jewish people—hence, his ticket to favor would be his crowning achievement of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem
- Herod was a master-builder who had planned for his buildings to outlast even the great Pyramids of Egypt
- We know from writers at the time of Christ that the Temple was an amazing structure.

¹ Douglas Sean O’Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 695.

What Herod had constructed seemed permanent—‘How could they reconcile Jesus’ words of destruction with the seemingly permanence of the buildings?’

- Mark 13:1—“As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”
- Luke 21:5—“And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said,”
- What the disciples are saying is, ‘Is it true that these magnificent structures will all be flattened???’

One writer: “Herod’s temple was a glorious building indeed. It was constructed of huge white marble stones plated with gold. Some of the stones, in fact, weighed as much as 100 tons, and shined so brightly in the sun that people could hardly look at them. The rabbis insisted, ‘He who has not seen Herod’s Temple has not seen a beautiful building.’ So the disciples could hardly believe their ears. ‘Did we hear you correctly, Lord? Will this marvelous temple be made desolate?’”²

While the disciples are impressed with the Temple structure and architecture, Jesus focuses on its demolition.

- The irony is the disciples are marveling at a *condemned* building.

24:2—“And He said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.”

- Instead of being impressed by the outward beauty, Jesus was deeply concerned with the inward condition of God’s people.
- Jesus has assessed the city of Jerusalem as ‘unwilling’ as ‘desolate’
- Israel had broken God’s covenant and now, they have rejected God’s Messiah—God’s Son

The Lord’s answer was unequivocal. “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (24:2, NKJV).

- ‘truly’ or ‘assuredly’—In other words, ‘You can trust this statement’—‘not one stone shall be left upon another’
 - ‘Why are you marveling at a condemned building???’
 - They stood in ‘admiration’ while Jesus stood in ‘condemnation’
- Note: some 40 years later, the Roman legions, led by the emperor’s son, Titus, destroyed the temple and the city.
- According to Josephus, the city was ruined to such an extent that one could hardly tell that the area had been previously inhabited.

The disciples are reeling because of Jesus’ announcement of judgment, and shocked by the statement of the Temple’s demolition—this is inconceivable to them

- The Temple represented not only the glory of Israel and their God but the permanence of their religion.
- Jesus just predicted that the Temple will be irreversibly flattened—what will that mean for our religion??? Our worship???

² Larry Pettegrew, TMSJ 13/2 (Fall 2002) 173-190.

- So, if Jesus says these things will happen, it must mean the end of the world

In their minds, such a tragedy could only be linked to the end of the age and Christ's return in judgment.

- Jer 9:11—"I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, A haunt of jackals; And I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant."
- Micah 3:12—"Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, And the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest."

2. The Disciples' Question on Timing. 24:3—"As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'"

- Jesus descends the temple hill, down the Kidron valley, and ascends the Mount of Olives, several hundred feet higher than the Temple.
- Jesus sits, as typical of a Jewish Rabbi—this was a teachable moment
- This was a private address to the disciples

3. The unexpected delay. Jesus explains that contrary to the disciples' thinking, His glorious Kingdom on earth would not begin immediately.

- The great Messianic Kingdom promised by the OT prophets was to be delayed, and instead there would be a period characterized by false Messiah's, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, false religions, secularism, as well as the preaching of the gospel.
- Such events would typify the era from the time of the Lord's prophecy up to the middle of the seven- year tribulation.

In verses 4-14, Jesus gives the disciples clear instruction as to how they are to persevere through difficult times ahead. These 'signs' are what the disciples will face leading up to the destruction of 70AD and beyond—for the entire church age up to the Rapture then to middle of the tribulation period.

- The disciples want to know 'when' the temple will be destroyed—and because they link the destruction of the Temple with the end of the age, they want to know what the signs of the end will be.
- Jesus does not answer in a specific way, but gives general indicators—which in effect prevent them from calculating when the temple's destruction will occur

Notice the events that will characterize this period:

Spiritual Deception

24:4-5—"And Jesus answered and said to them, 'See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.'"

- There have always been spiritual deceivers who oppose God's laws
- Jesus says, 'many will be misled...but you should not be misled'
- There will be many false Messiah's (here) and many false prophets (24:11)
- Spiritual deception will be rampant—and people will be deceived
- Many will say, 'I am the Christ...I'm back' or many will claim to be Christ's spokesman

- There will be times when people are truly confused as to who Jesus Christ really is—that was true then, and it’s true now
- Many will come and say they represent Christ—‘don’t be misled...don’t be fooled’

Perilous conditions that foster a culture of fear

24:6—“You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.”

- ‘wars and rumor of wars’—have existed in nearly every generation of the church
- Jesus is saying there will be a culture caught up in fear over wars and the threats of war
- People will be easily misled, and people will become preoccupied with a culture of panic
- Jesus says, ‘See to it that you are not frightened’—in other words, ‘don’t get caught up in it...don’t fear...God is still in control of every detail of life’

Notice: ‘for those things *must take place*’—why? Because God is sovereign and all these events are necessary because he himself has planned them

- This is the same language as in John 3—‘you *must* be born again’—‘this is the will of God’
 - Just as John the Baptist said, ‘I *must* decrease and Christ *must* increase’
 - That was the will of God—and that’s what Jesus is saying here
- When the world seems to be careening out of control, God is sovereignly using all these things for his ordained plan and purposes...he’s moving world history to its divinely appointed end’
- Thus, don’t join the culture of panic—these things *must* happen
- God is the One who ordains trials

24:7—“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.”

- God sovereignly raises up nations, even corrupt ones that will accomplish His will and His purposes
- ‘nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom’—political upheaval is not the end
 - Every time there’s an upheaval or a catastrophe—someone somewhere is saying ‘because of this, Jesus is coming back’
- There will be geological upheaval in various places—this is not the end but the beginning of the end
- Both real and rumored warfare, earthquakes, and famines should not frighten God’s people—that’s not the end
- These are merely the first stages of woes that must come against the world

24:8—“But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.”

- The idea implied is: this will be an extended time of ‘labor’ before the end comes
- These ‘signs’ are likened to the very beginning of the first pains of childbirth
- The first labor pain does not equal childbirth
- Jesus uses this imagery so that none of His disciples will attempt at setting dates for His return
- ‘wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes’ are all just the beginning—this is the beginning of a process

Persecution—spiritual deception, violent wars, and natural disasters will be accompanied by spiritual persecution—24:9—“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.”

- ‘they’—comes from out of nowhere (no antecedent)—who are the they??? Those who oppose the truth, oppose the gospel, and hate Christ
- The true disciples of Christ will be universally hated because of their connection with Christ
- You should expect rejection, hatred, and even death because of Jesus Christ
- Things are not going to get easier for followers of Christ

This outward pressure will have devastating effects upon the believing community—and some are going to abandon their professed faith

Apostasy

24:10—“At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.”

- Who are the ‘one-anothers’??? Those who once professed Christ but have walked away from their faith
- The phony believer will betray or ‘rat out’ those who are genuine believers—they will betray them, go against them, hate them
- Persecution will have a purifying effect—expect it
- The problem we face in America is we live in fear of ‘offending’ someone—we don’t want to hurt someone’s feelings
- The church that is faithful to the truth should be a constant irritation to the world around it—not friends with it
- We don’t try to be obnoxious—but the message of the gospel is an offense to a proud, selfish unbeliever

False Teachers

24:11—“Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.”

- False spokesmen will arise—and false doctrine always leads to unholy living
- Titus 1:15-16—“To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”
- Today, there are many false messengers promoting a false message

Lawlessness that feeds self-love

24:12—“Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.”

- ‘lawlessness’ increases and ‘love for God’ grows cold—and when the Law of God is not taught, lawlessness increases
- The summation of the whole Law and Prophets is to ‘love the Lord God and to love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matt 22:34-40)
- The Apostle Paul even says that in the last days men/women will lose natural affections—for loved ones/family members (2 Tim 3)
- Matthew 7—Jesus says ‘depart from me you who *practice lawlessness*’

- Matthew 13—Jesus says about the wheat and the tares—that God will send forth his angels and they will remove out of his Kingdom ‘all stumbling blocks and those who *commit lawlessness*.’
- Jesus said of the Pharisees in 23:28—“So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”
- ‘lawlessness always leads to lovelessness’
- 2 Thess 2:7—the Apostle Paul says that the ‘mystery of lawlessness is already at work’ in the world—in society—and as lawlessness increases, so love for God and love for others diminishes

The need for perseverance in the gospel

24:13—“But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

- The response of the genuine disciple will be fidelity and perseverance
- Those who persevere in obeying Christ are in stark contrast with those who love themselves and serve their own desires
- The salvation promised those who persevere and endure is not merely rescue from persecution but future rewards for obedience to Christ

It is this kind of perseverance in faith and obedience that results in the kingdom message being preached to all the nations before the end comes

24:14—“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.”

- The end will come—but perseverance and obedience to Christ and gospel ministry must occur first
- ‘Don’t stop proclaiming the gospel...persevere...even though people will malign you, they cannot take away your message

Don’t get caught up trying to figure out the coming of Christ—but get busy proclaiming the good news

God is moving the gospel forward—don’t be sad, but be glad that God is bringing dark times for the light of Christ to shine in