

# The Exhortation to Be Prepared for His Coming

📖 Matthew 24:32-42

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We are studying Matthew 24-25, Jesus' most extensive discussion of future events and His last discourse to the nation Israel, commonly known as the Olivet Discourse because of the location it was given was Mount Olivet or the Mount of Olives, but I prefer to call it The Discourse on Kingdom Coming since the content of the discourse is the events that immediately precede the establishment of the kingdom. We are dividing the discourse into three sections for ease of study; Matthew 23:37-24:31, The Sign of His Coming; Matt 24:32-42, Exhortations for those Living in that Time to Be Prepared for His Coming; and Matt 24:43-25:46, The Judgments at His Coming to determine Kingdom Entrance or Exclusion and Reward for those who Enter.

In the first section, Matthew 23:37-24:31, The Sign of His Coming, we begin with 23:37-24:3 which is the Setting for the discourse. In 23:37 Jesus pronounced the rejection, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling." That generation rejected Him. In verse 38 He pronounces judgment on that generation for the rejection. "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate." Their Temple would go to destruction signifying God was no longer with them. In verse 39 He pronounces a postponement of the kingdom, "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say," and He quotes the Messianic Greeting from Ps 118:26, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" So the kingdom was being postponed. In 24:1 as they were walking away from the temple "His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him." They were concerned about His statement that the Temple would go to destruction. In 24:2 He assures them that is indeed what would happen, "Do you not see all these things?" That is, all the temple buildings. "Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." In 24:3 they came to rest on the Mount of Olives and as Jesus "was sitting" the disciples came to Him privately," Mark 13 tells us it was Peter, James, John and Andrew, and they were saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen," and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" It is these two questions that provide the context for Jesus' answer. The first question, "when will these things happen" is a question about when the Temple would be destroyed, when not one stone would be left upon another. Jesus answered the question but only Luke recorded the answer. There is no parallel in Matthew or Mark to what Luke says in Luke 21:12-22,

which essentially is this, before all the other things mentioned in the discourse, the religious leaders will lay their hands on the apostles and persecute them and they will stand before kings and give a testimony that will not be able to be refuted, and they would be betrayed but the Lord would protect them and then Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies and the believers in Jerusalem must flee in order to escape the judgment that was coming on that generation for their unpardonable sin of vilely rejecting the Messiah, claiming His works were done by Satan and not the Spirit. So only Luke records the answer to the first question and it relates to the period covered in the Book of Acts leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 which happened at the hands of the Romans. The second question, "what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" may look like two questions but grammatically it is really one, they were tied together, and the question is about what sign they can look for to know that He is coming, bringing an end to this age and the beginning of the kingdom age. Matthew, Mark and Luke record this answer. Matthew gives the most extensive answer because Matthew's gospel is about the King and His kingdom program.

In 24:4-8 we have The First Half of the Tribulation. In 24:4 the primary characterization of the Tribulation will be deception. "Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you." They will need to be on guard because many deceptions will occur during the time immediately preceding His coming. In 24:5 He says there will be many false Christ's. "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many." I think many Jews are in mind. Many Jews will think that these false Messiahs are the Messiah. In 24:6 the Jews "will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars." These wars will occur outside the land so the emphasis is on Jews inside the land and wars outside the land. It presupposes a regathering of Jews to the land after the dispersion from the land in AD70. But, He adds, "See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end." These are things that will happen in the first half of the tribulation, but they do not signal the end when He will come. In 24:7 He gives further explanation of these wars by saying there will be wars between nations as well as wars between confederations of nations, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." Then He adds two other things that will be happening, "and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes." These are all in the first half of the tribulation when the Jews in the land are in the treaty with the anti-Christ and are trusting in Him for their peace and security, but the world is falling apart around them. In 24:8 Jesus assures them this is not the end, "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs." The birth pangs are what a woman experiences just before she is about to give birth. They begin they intensify until the child is born. The OT used this metaphor to refer to the difficult events in the world just prior to the kingdom's arrival. The things in verse 4-7 are the beginning of the difficulties the world will face before the kingdom's arrival. But these things are still at least 3 ½ years before the end when He will come.

In 24:9-14 we have The Second Half of the Tribulation. In 24:9 the hatred of the nations for the Jewish remnant will escalate significantly. They will have aligned with Jesus as the Messiah and therefore against the anti-Messiah. Therefore, "they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name." The rest of the world, for the most part, will be going after the anti-Messiah. In 24:10 "At

that time many will fall away” or stumble “and will betray one another and hate one another.” There will be a division among the Jewish people between the remnant and the non-remnant and the non-remnant will be betraying the remnant over to the anti-Messiah. In 24:11, there will also be a slew of false prophets among the Jews in the land, “Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.” These false prophets will lead many Jews away from Jesus as the true Messiah and to the anti-Messiah. In 24:12 there will be increasing antagonism toward law resulting in lack of compassion. “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. “But,” by contrast, in 24:13, some during the second half will endure to the end in compassion toward others and they will be saved,” or rescued, evidently by the Messiah Himself when He returns. At that time 24:14 tells us “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 kingdom will be near and this message will be proclaimed to the whole world and then the tribulation will come to a close. Verse 14 is the end of the Tribulation and so verses 4-14 cover the entire tribulation, vv 4-8 refer to the first half, the beginning of birth pangs, vv 9-14 the second half, the end of the birth pangs, and at this point the Messiah will come in the way described in vv 29-30.

But before Jesus explains His coming and the sign of His coming, which is the question He is answering, He gives the Jewish remnant something to be looking for so they can escape Jerusalem before the second half of the tribulation when they will be persecuted greatly. So 24:15-16 gives the event that marks the beginning of the second half of the tribulation and vv 17-28 more characterization of the second half. In 24:15-16, The Abomination of Desolation marks the beginning of the second half. “Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.” Daniel 9:27 said this will happen in the middle of the tribulation, so this begins the second half of the tribulation and overlays with vv 9-14. Only the believing Jewish remnant in the land would need to heed these words since the persecution will be centered in the land of Israel, led by the anti-Messiah. Therefore, members of the Jewish remnant in other portions of the world will not need to flee. But these in the land will need to flee.

In 24:17-28 we have More Characterizations of the Second Half of the Tribulation. In 24:17-18 the warning is to immediately heed the command to flee. “Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.” There won’t be time for gathering necessities. Besides, the Lord will provide for them as He provided for the wilderness generation. In 24:19 a special pronouncement of woe is given to those who have traveling disabilities. “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!” They will probably not be able to escape the anti-Messiah. And in 24:20 a command for a specific prayer, “But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath,” both issues that would limit travel of the remnant to a place of safety. In 24:21-22 a special note of the uniqueness of the second half of the tribulation is made. “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.” In other words, the

second half of the tribulation will be the most catastrophic the world has ever seen. The period is set to be 3 ½ years in Daniel so the word “cutting short” should be translated “suddenly terminated.” It will come to a sudden termination when the Messiah returns in vv 29-30. And if He did not return then the catastrophic judgments would have continued and exterminated every living creature with the breath of life in it. But He will return for the sake of the elect, which are the Jewish remnant, because Jesus already said in 23:39 that the Jewish people would not see Him until they say “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” So they will say this and it will be the catalyst that brings about Jesus’ return described in vv 29-30. In 24:23-28 Jesus says that His coming will not be so obscure that people will have to be told where He is. Even if people claim that He is in a hidden location somewhere, and doing great signs and wonders to accompany the message, the Jewish remnant should not believe them and come out of hiding to find Him. In 24:23, “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him.” For false Christ’s and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.” These are signs and wonders done by false Messiahs and false prophets in order to lure the Jewish remnant out of hiding in the wilderness so they can destroy them. In 24:25 Jesus has “told” them all this “in advance” so they should know. If they say, in 24:26, “Behold, He is in the wilderness,” that is, nearby to where they are hiding, “do not go out,” or ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them.” These are all lies because the coming of the Son of Man will not be an obscure event. It will be a public event. 24:27 describes what the coming of the Son of Man will be like. It will be just like lightning flashing from one side of the sky to the other. Like lightning it will be sudden. It will be unpredictable. When He comes 24:28 to fight on behalf of Israel at the Campaign of Armageddon, mass carnage will result for those who went up against Israel, the apple of God’s eye. Then in 24:29, “immediately after the tribulation of those days,” so the seven years have elapsed, the tribulation is complete, now we finally come to the answer the disciples asked for, what will be the sign of Your coming. Well, first of all, there will be a blackout. “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” So a blackout and a great shaking coming from heaven. Zechariah 14:6 agrees, it says it will be a day of thick darkness. With that background 24:29 tells us the sign. “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky,” and yet we are not told what the sign is, but seeing as you can’t see anything in the dark except light the sign must be some kind of light. The light is probably Shechinah Glory, the visible indicator of God’s presence. And upon seeing the light all the tribes of the land of Israel will mourn. Zechariah 12:12ff agrees, they will each be in mourning, the house of David by itself, their wives by themselves, the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves and so forth and so on. And then that is it, “they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. Then, in accordance with Isa 27:12-13, He will gather the rest of the Jewish people from around the world. “And He will send forth His angels” to do so...

Today we come to the second section in the Discourse on Kingdom Coming, Matthew 24:32-42, Exhortation for those Living in that Time to Be Prepared for His Coming. This is a section where many people try to find the Rapture. But the section is designed to exhort the Jews living in the time of the Tribulation, which has just been

described, about how to live during that time. It has nothing to do with the Church or how we should live. We don't live in the Tribulation and we won't. The next portion of this series will show why. So this is an excursus to give exhortation to the generation of Jews who will live in the time of the Tribulation and are seeing the rise of many false Christ's, hearing the wars and rumors of wars, the abomination of desolation, the intense hatred of all nations, not just one nation, all nations, division amongst themselves concerning the identity of the Messiah, a loss of compassion between the Jewish people and great signs and wonders. They need to have some instruction on how to live in that unique time and that is what we find in 24:32-41. Pentecost said, "Before resuming the chronology of prophetic events (Matt. 25:1), the Lord paused to give certain parenthetical exhortations concerning watchfulness and preparedness (24:32-51). He applied His teaching to those who will witness the great events of which He had previously spoken."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the exhortations apply strictly to the generation that sees these great things.

We begin with 24:32-35, The Parable of the Fig Tree. Since a parable is a teaching device that uses something well-known from life and true to life to teach something unknown, then what is known about the fig tree here was known to Jewish people in the land. The question is what did they know? Let's read the parable. In verse 32, "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near;" That is what they already knew. Verse 33 is what they are to learn from this, "so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, *right* at the door. <sup>34</sup>"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. <sup>35</sup>"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." So what is it that they knew? In verse 32 they knew that **when the branch of the fig tree has already become tender and put forth its leaves...summer is near**. Now the fig tree is often mistaken for the nation Israel because of a few questionable passages about Israel and a fig tree. And when this interpretation is taken the point is made that when Israel became a state in 1948 that it would only be one generation until the rapture or the second coming. And from this many dates have been suggested beginning with the second coming in 1988 and subtracting seven years to get the rapture in 1981 and since these predictions are all built on a faulty foundation they have all been wrong and every year has been predicted since and every year has not been the year. They keep changing the length of "a generation" because every guess they make has turned out wrong and they want to keep selling books and making money so they just keep changing the date and writing more books. But the basis is completely faulty. What the Jewish people knew was not that they were the fig tree but the lifecycle of the fig tree. They knew that when they saw a fig tree putting off its early shoots it was a sign that summer was near. And verse 33 tells then what they were to learn from the lifecycle of the fig tree. **So, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door**. The million dollar question is, when **you see** what **things**? All the things in 24:4-28, all the things of the Tribulation. When they see the rise of many false Christ's, not just a few, many. When they hear of wars and rumors of wars. Not like today, but wars between nations as well as confederacies of nations, many of them, all going on at the same time so that the whole world is enmeshed in wars, not one war, many wars, all going on over different issues in a global struggle

for world dominance. When they see the abomination of desolation, that is a major sign, especially for Jews in the land, when they see all those things it is like seeing a fig tree putting off its first spring shoots, and it signals that Jesus is near to returning, that He is **right at the door**. So when the nation Israel sees the events of the Tribulation they should know that Jesus' coming is near.

In 24:34 Jesus says, **Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place**. Now sometimes the **generation** here is taken to mean the apostle's generation, because he says **I say to you** and the apostles are standing there. But it should be quite clear that that **generation** did not see **all these things take place**. And in the context He is talking about the generation that does see **all these things take place**. That **generation will not pass away until all the things** in 24:4-28 take place. In other words, the point is that all these things will take place within a generation, and in fact we know how long it will take for them to take place, seven years. We know that because it is Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. It won't take long. It is not a long drawn out affair any more than the Flood was a long drawn out affair. It happened very quickly and these events will happen very quickly. The whole world will be changed dramatically in a very short period of time.

Now verse 35, what does this mean? **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away**. It's simply a confirmation that these things will take place. What things? His **words** about the tribulation judgments followed by His coming. These things will most certainly take place. Why? Because God is going to establish His kingdom on this earth, and to do that He has to smash all the kingdoms of Satan that are filling the earth at this time. Then He can establish His kingdom on earth. So the Tribulation judgments are how He smashes Satan's kingdoms which stir up chaos and strife and then He can establish His kingdom of peace and tranquility. So this is just like Daniel 2 and the four metal statue with the stone coming to smash the statue and grow to fill the whole earth. There is nothing new here. 24:35 is Jesus' confirmation of the certainty of His words about the Tribulation coming to pass followed by His return to earth. And He says those words are more certain than the continuation of the present universe. Yet how many people believe these things are coming? Not many, and they will be shocked, they will be astonished.

Now in 24:36-42 we have A Description of What the Second Coming will be Like. We were already told in 24:27 that it will be just like lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west. So we know it will be sudden and unpredictable. These verses elaborate on that idea and give exhortation for being prepared in light of it. So though the tribulation judgments and His coming are certain there is something that will not be certain for those living in that time. What is it? The exact moment of His coming. **But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone**. Now sometimes people say, well you can just calculate the day of Jesus' second coming because we know that it will be seven years from when the anti-Messiah signs the covenant with Israel. Therefore, this can't be talking about the second coming. This must be talking about the Rapture. So we just do the math. Well, first of all, what would the rapture have to do with the argument Jesus is making? Why would they suddenly be taught about the rapture, a subject which has never

been revealed. In fact, the Church hasn't even come into existence and won't for another two months on the Day of Pentecost. So if He is introducing the concept of the rapture for the very first time here then there is absolutely no question that the apostles were clueless about what He meant. Secondly, will people in that time really be able to calculate the exact moment of the Second Coming by doing the math? How many treaties are signed every day between nations behind closed doors? All of them. And we don't know the exact moment they signed on the dotted line or it went into effect. It would be very difficult for anyone living in that time to know the precise time the covenant was signed. And the point of the verse saying **But of that day and hour no one knows**, is to say that no one knows the precise time of His coming. They may have a general idea but they won't know specifically. Third, even if someone was privy to the exact time they signed the treaty or it went into effect, the Tribulation is full of multiple blackouts, shaking in the heavens, unprecedented wars and famines as well as other global catastrophes. If the world was like that, would one really be able to keep up with days? I think not. History shows many times when people lost track of time because they were exhausted from war and famine and when you add blackouts for extended periods of time, there is simply no way one can keep up with time. And lastly, 24:42 says explicitly that people living in that time will not know, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." So the Bible explicitly says no one knows. Therefore, this has nothing to do with the Rapture, Christ coming to remove His church to heaven, but it has to do with the Second Coming, Christ's coming to establish His kingdom on earth. But then other people say, no, it's got to be the rapture because it sounds like the rapture. It says no one will know the day and the hour and the rapture is like that, no one knows when it will happen. I got that. I know it sounds similar. But that doesn't mean it is the rapture. In the context it's the Second Coming, not the Rapture. The Rapture had never been revealed before and this is not the context it is introduced. This is a context about the Tribulation and the Second Coming and how people living during the Tribulation should live when they see the things in 24:4-28. What the Rapture would have to do with that, I have no clue, unless you are a post-tribulationist. And if I held that this was the Rapture I would be a post-tribulationist. But I honestly think it is an entirely silly view. So what does verse 36 mean then? It means exactly what it says, **No one knows** the precise moment of the coming of the Son of Man, **not even the angels** who stand in the presence of the Father, nor even the Son who stands in closest relation to the Father. What do you mean Jesus? You don't even know? I thought you were God, I thought you had divine omniscience. Of course He does. But He is speaking from the point of view of His incarnational humanity. In His deity He knows everything, but in His incarnational humanity the Father only revealed some things to Him and the exact moment of His coming was not one of those things. Therefore, this stands as an everlasting warning to those who like to set dates. You don't set dates. Even those who live in the Tribulation will not be able to set the exact date of the Second Coming. That is why it will be so important for them to pay attention to the events Jesus described since, like the fig tree, they indicate that He is near, right at the door. 24:37 explains that His coming will be identical in some way to the days of Noah. **For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah**. The comparative adverb **just like** means identical in some way. The point of identity is not everything in **the days of Noah** but one thing; namely, that the people in **the days of Noah** lived in

extraordinary times and the people living during the Tribulation will be living in extraordinary times. Think about **the days of Noah**. This man Noah and his family were building an ark on dry land and proclaiming a coming flood, and yet the people who saw and heard this continued to pursue their daily routines, not paying heed to these signs of an impending flood. And they continued in this way even until the very day that Noah entered the ark. That's what verse 38 is saying, **For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark.** In other words, they did not pay attention to the unique events of their day, such as Noah building a giant ark on dry land and preaching righteousness. Instead they disregarded these things and their significance and went on pursuing their daily routines. People misread this when they say, "Well, you're saying that during the Tribulation these people will just be living a normal life, how could that be?" That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying the point of similarity between Noah's day and the coming tribulation is that they are both extraordinary times when people will ignore the significance of the events as heralding a coming great judgment, and they will do so to their own demise. Nothing in verse 38 or 39 say that people in the Tribulation will be eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage. It says they did that before the Flood while Noah was building the ark, even up **until the day he entered the ark**. But not those in the tribulation. It says the point of similarity in verse 39 is **they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be**, meaning the people in the tribulation will not understand the significance of the catastrophes and so they will not be prepared for His coming and they will be swept away in judgment on the day He comes with great power and glory. We'll look more at the judgments next week, they are the rest of chapter 24 and 25, but here we are given in verses 40-41 a brief description of the judgment that will take place when He returns. Sure, some unbelievers will be killed at the Campaign of Armageddon, right when He returns, but there will be some unbelievers left on the planet and they will have to go to a judgment. That's what this is describing. **Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.** People say, this sounds like the rapture, it must be the rapture. I know it could sound like the rapture. I'm not stupid. But that is taking it out of context. What's the context? The Second Coming of Christ to establish His kingdom. Remember the question of 24:3, what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age? The disciples want to know when Jesus is coming to establish His kingdom. He doesn't do that at the Rapture. That is irrelevant. And what is the immediate context? It's a comparison between what happened at the Flood and what will happen at the Second Coming. When the Flood came what happened? All those who believed, Noah and his family, were protected in the ark from the judgment so that they were **left** on earth to re-populate the earth and those who did not believe, everybody else, were swept away in judgment, **taken** in judgment. The one's **left** were **left** to re-populate the earth. The one's **taken** were **taken** off the earth, destroyed by the waters of the Flood. So it will be in the coming of the Son of Man. Those who are believers will be **left** on earth to re-populate the earth during the kingdom and those who are unbelievers will be **taken** away by judgment and cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.



The application for those living in the Tribulation is 24:42. **Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.** The word **alert** means “in a constant state of readiness,” “prepared.” And how can they be prepared? With salvation. The only way to be prepared in the tribulation time for the Second Coming is to have salvation, to have trusted in Jesus Christ. And they will want to do that as soon as they realize the significance of the judgments unfolding around them because as the verse says they don’t **know which day their Lord is coming.** So they will need to be in a state of constant readiness with salvation as early in the Tribulation as possible so that when He comes they are ready. So 24:32-42 are the exhortations for those living during the Tribulation to be prepared for the Second Coming. The verses have nothing to do with the Rapture. There’s plenty about the Rapture in other places of the Bible. I wouldn’t worry about that. And it falls in very different contexts, as you will see, they are not judgment contexts like this, they are comfort contexts. Judgment and comfort differ greatly and these are Jesus’ greatest words on prophecy, they arise out of the OT prophecy, they agree in every respect and we should respect what He has taught as the pieces of the puzzle fall into place easily.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 405.