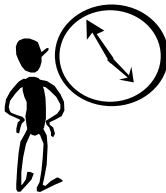


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### Time of Assembly



#### **Sunday:**

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.

<b>Wednesday:</b>	7:00 p.m.
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## Understanding Matthew 24

By Jeffrey W. Hamilton

The teachings of Jesus recorded in Matthew 24 are commonly misapplied by people in the denominational world. People want to know what will happen in the future. They don't enjoy having secrets kept from them. This is true whether we are talking about our jobs lasting another year or about important religious matters, such as the second coming of Christ. Many people believe that Jesus has told us when he would return and the signs of that return are recorded in Matthew 24.

To gain a better understand of what Jesus taught, we must first turn to Matthew 23 and see the context of Jesus' statements. In this chapter, Jesus brings numerous charges against the Jewish leaders for their mistreatment of God's Law (Matthew 23:1-32). He then concludes his condemnation by prophesying the consequences of their errors (Matthew 23:33-36). The Jews had killed God's people in the past. Through this current generation though they were above such misdeeds, Jesus state that they would continue to kill righteous people. They were not above the misdeeds of their forefathers, they were just as guilty. The punishment for killing God's people would fall upon this very generation.

This is a shocking statement to those who had been expecting a rebirth of the Jewish nation! As Jesus and the disciples were leaving Jerusalem, the disciples were pointing out to Jesus the glories of the temple. Jesus used the opportunity to emphasize his point. He stated the temple would be destroyed to the point that not one stone would be left upon another. Now to the Jews, such a destruction of the temple could only mean the end of Jerusalem, their nation, and the world. When they had a private moment with Jesus, they asked him three questions: 1) When will these things happen? 2) What will be the sign of your coming? 3) What will be the sign of

the end of the age?

As we read through the gospels, we are struck with the fact that Jesus often answers the actual question asked and not the question the person thought they were asking. His answer to his disciple's questions is no different. To the disciples, all three questions dealt with the same event, but Jesus' answer shows there are two events being asked about. In Matthew 24:4-34, he answers the question about the end of Jerusalem. In Matthew 24:36-25:46, he addresses the topic of the end of the world.

## The Destruction of Jerusalem

Jesus warns his disciples that the destruction of Jerusalem would be soon. In fact it would occur in their generation (Matthew 23:36; 24:34). The words translated "this generation" do not refer to an age, but to the people living at the time Jesus was speaking. For example, in Matthew 11:16-19, Jesus scolds the people of that generation for not giving heed to John and Jesus. Later, Jesus said there would be some of that generation who would not see death before Jesus' kingdom was established (Matthew 16:28).

The times leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem would be unusual. There would be an increase in the number of wars, famines, and earthquakes (Matthew 24:6-8). The persecution of the disciples would also increase (Matthew 24:9-13). These predictions have been supported by historians of the time period between A.D. 50 and A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed.

In addition to general signs, Jesus gives his disciples specific signs to watch for which would tell them that the destruction of Jerusalem would be soon. Before Jerusalem would be destroyed, the gospel would be preached to the whole world (Matthew 24:14). Paul stated this was accomplished in Colossians 1:23. Just prior to the destruction, the "abomination of desolation," which Daniel prophesied, would take place. In Luke's account of these same matters, Jesus said that the Roman army would surround Jerusalem just prior to the desolation (Luke 21:20). Josephus speaks of a tyrant, named Simon, who slew the priests "as they were about their sacred duties... many persons, who came thither with great zeal from the ends of the earth, to offer sacrifices at this celebrated place... fell down before their own sacrifices themselves, and sprinkled that altar... with their own blood; till the dead bodies of strangers were mingled together with those of their own country, and those of profane persons with those of the priests, and the blood of all sorts of dead carcasses stood in lakes in the holy courts themselves." This happened just prior to Titus marching on Jerusalem.

These signs would give those who paid heed to them plenty of advance warning (Matthew 24:32-33). When they saw the signs, Jesus urges his followers to flee Jerusalem as fast as they possibly could (Matthew 24:16-22). He urged them to pray that the time would not come a time during which flight would be hindered, such as during the winter or on the Sabbath when the gates of Jerusalem would be closed. Jesus also

warned them not to delay because of misleading statements by people falsely calling themselves the Christ (Matthew 24:23-28). Many people will ignore Jesus' warnings because of these people. However, the Christians have their warning (Matthew 24:24-25). According to traditional history, Christians heeded their Master and not one Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The destruction prophesied, while severe, was limited only to Jerusalem and the nation of Israel (Matthew 23:25; 24:1-2). Descriptive terms are used to show the severity of this destruction which are similar to the terms used for the destruction of Babylon (Isaiah 13:9-11, Joel 2:10) and of Egypt (Isaiah 11:12; 19:1).

## Transition

Jesus assures his listeners in Matthew 24:35 that these things will happen and God will not alter what Jesus has just prophesied.

## The End of the World

Jesus now moves to a new topic, concerning when the end of the world will take place. Unlike the end of Jerusalem, the time for the end of the world is not known even Jesus did not know when the end will be (Matthew 24:36). Notice that Jesus calls this event "that day." This is the same phrase used by Paul (I Thessalonians 5:2) and Peter (II Peter 3:10-13) in regard to the end of the world.

The end of Jerusalem would be preceded by unusual events, but at the end of the age, the times will appear to be normal (Matthew 24:37-39). Paul said people would be thinking content thoughts of peace and safety (I Thessalonians 5:3). Nothing unusual would precede the end. No warnings, no signs, nothing to mark the event in advance.

Without advance warning, there is no possibility of preparing for the end at the last moment. Therefore, we must be prepared for the event to happen at any time (Matthew 24:42-45; I Thessalonians 5:4-11). Nor will there be an opportunity to hide from this event (Matthew 24:40-41; I Thessalonians 5:3). This will be a universal judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), whom no one can escape.

Compare the two halves of Jesus' answer to his disciples:

### **Destruction of Jerusalem**

#### **Matthew 23:36-24:35**

1. The time is identifiable.
2. It will occur in "this generation."
3. The events prior will be unusual.
4. There will be advance warnings.
5. The example of the fig tree.
6. The judgment will be local on the nation of Israel.
7. Specific signs of the coming judgment can be seen.
8. There will be time to escape the judgment.

### **Destruction of the World**

#### **Matthew 24:36-25:46**

- The time is unknown.  
It will happen on "that day."  
The events prior will be typical.  
There will be no warning  
The example of the thief.  
The judgment will be universal.  
No advance sign of the end.  
There will be no time for flight.

Too often, people mix the events from the destruction of Jerusalem with the events dealing with the end of the world. This leads people to believe they can predict the end of the world, even though Jesus clearly states that there will be no warning. You will not know years, months, weeks, or even days in advance of Jesus' return. You will not have a chance to make last minute preparations. You must be prepared for the Master to return at any moment. Are you ready?

## Overcoming Fear

By Jeffrey W. Hamilton

It seems wherever we turn, there is something to fear. Some people are afraid of snakes or spiders. Others fear what will happen to the stock market. Instead of being debilitated by our fears, we need to learn how to continue to function despite our fears.

### Finances

Many people have fears over their future financial situation. There are concerns about having enough money for retirement, worries about the stability of the stock market, or fears of losing one's job. Even if we are currently enjoying a comfortable life, we must be mindful that wealth and prosperity are flighty things ([Proverbs 23:4-5](#)). If our confidence and contentment are based on maintaining our wealth, then we live on shaky ground. Instead, our hopes should be anchored to our unchanging God ([I Timothy 6:17](#)). We may have to face difficult times, but we can trust our Father to care for His children ([Luke 12:22-32](#)).

### The Future

Most fears are caused by facing the unknown. We don't know what will happen, so we don't know how to prepare. People see they are not in control and they fear what may happen. No one truly knows what the future may hold for us ([Proverbs 27:1](#)). Oh, some things are fairly predictable - I know I will be older tomorrow, if I live that long. However, other things are far less certain. Unfortunately, Satan plays on our fears of the unknown. The popular panic over the ability of programs to handle the year 2000 is a wide spread example of the fear of the unknown. We all know the account of Saul's visit to the witch at Endor ([I Samuel 28:4-7](#)). The reason Saul sought out a witch was because God had stopped talking to him and he was facing a major battle. Saul wanted to know what the outcome of the battle would be.

No matter what the future may hold, we can take comfort in knowing what the ultimate outcome of our lives here on earth. God has told us about the end in advance. As Isaac took comfort in knowing what the future held for his descendants ([Genesis 26:24](#)), we take comfort in the hope of the Scriptures.

### Failure

Another demoralizing fear is the fear of failure. In the parable of the talents, the

man given one talent hid his money so he could return it to his master. He was afraid to do anything with the money for fear of losing it all ([Matthew 25:24-25](#)). The fear of failing is a powerful immobilizer. We would rather stay where we are than to risk the unknown and fail.

This is why God told Gideon to send away all those who were afraid of battle ([Judges 7:2-3](#)). An army of the fearful is no army at all. Fear spreads rapidly from one person to another as each begins to realize what failure could bring ([Deuteronomy 20:8](#)). Because of fear, many will not become a child of God. Because of fear, many will not grow as a Christian and apply themselves to new service for their King. Because of fear, many will lose their souls ([Revelation 21:8](#)).

### Criticism

We all want others to think well of us, so when we face doing things others may not like, we hesitate ([Proverbs 29:25](#)). So many people are lead into the paths of sin because others around them were leading the way ([Proverbs 1:10-16](#)). Peter denied knowing Jesus because of those around him ([Matthew 26:69-75](#)). Several followed Jesus while he was on earth, but they did so secretly for fear of others ([John 19:38](#)). However, our salvation comes through our willingness to take a public stand for our Lord ([Romans 10:9-10](#)). It is unfortunate that some people value their position with men more than their position with God. Jesus was maligned and we will be as well, but we should not fear man because God is watching over us ([Matthew 10:24-31](#)).

### Pain and Discomfort

Most of us want to be comfortable. Many will put off seeing a dentist solely to avoid the discomfort of having their teeth examined and repaired. Similarly, many Christians will do just about anything to avoid a confrontation. Yet, when Paul was thrown out of a city and stoned, he reentered the city ([Acts 14:19-20](#)). God expects us to remain faithful, even to the point of death ([Revelation 2:10](#)). With God on our side, there are only limited things men can do to us ([Psalm 118:6](#)).

### Death

Although we understand that we all must die, at least in theory, we are loath to apply the concept to ourselves ([Hebrews 9:27](#)). Death is one of those things we cannot control ([Ecclesiastes 8:8](#)). It is also scary because it involves the unknown. It moves us out of our familiar surroundings into something no one alive has experienced. Worse yet, we cannot reverse death and try it again later if we discover it is not to our liking. In reality, many fear death because they know they are not prepared for next life. Yet their very fear of death immobilizes them and they never manage to prepare ([Hebrews 2:15](#)).

### Trust in God

The way to overcome any fear is to place our full trust in God ([Psalm 61:1-4](#)). God has not given us reason to fear, but to be confident before him ([II Timothy 1:7](#)). Never let your fears hinder you from doing what is right.