

Matthew 24 Summary

Matthew 24 begins with Jesus beginning to answer the second question asked by his disciples as to what will be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age. He gives them an overview of the future seven-year tribulation period in Matthew 24:4–14 that includes many characteristics of that time period. Such things as false Christ's, earthquakes, famines, persecution, and evangelism are all included as general markers of that time period.

He then goes into more detail concerning the second half of the tribulation in verses 15–28. This three and a half years will include more intense tribulation, false Christs and prophets; with the added deception of great miracles, and cosmic signs on the horizon. Verse 30 depicts the second coming of Christ and verse 31 highlights a worldwide gathering of elect Jews from the entire world.

He then gives some warnings and instructions to urge those alive at the time to recognize that His coming is near. His illustration of the days of Noah highlight that many will be unprepared for His coming. Those who are unprepared for His return will be removed in judgment, just as those in Noah's day were removed in judgment. His exhortation now turns to a command to be ready for His coming.

Matthew 24:42–51 – Be Ready

After Jesus finishes His discourse on His Second Coming, He gives a few closing parables that illustrate the need for those alive during the tribulation (especially Jews) to be ready for that coming.

Notice He begins with the word ... 'Therefore.' Now what do we typically do when we see 'therefore' in the text of scripture. We take notice and pause for a second and realize that Jesus is transitioning to additional items that relate to the previous topic, which were the signs and general events surrounding His Second Coming. It is similar to His use in verse 15 ... "therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation ...". In a similar manner, what Jesus will say starting in verse 42 and going to the end of chapter 25 is intimately related to what He has already spoken. "Based on all this information that I have given you ... here are some additional items."

"Therefore, be on the alert ... " is the first admonition to those alive during this future time. Now the command to be on the alert is not a totally foreign concept in the Bible; however, it is used in different ways. For example, Jesus asks His disciples to 'keep watch' in the garden of Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed. It literally means 'stay awake, stay alert' in this context. Do not fall asleep. However, it is also used to denote *spiritual* alertness. For example, Paul uses this same word as a description of how we are to devote ourselves to prayer; by keeping alert in it (Col. 4:2). He also tells us to not sleep, again, spiritually, but to remain alert and sober (1 Thes. 5:6). It is interesting that here in 1 Thes. 5 we have a 'church age' command to be alert and it is in the context of the coming Day of the Lord. Notice Paul says that we as believers will not be taken by surprise by that Day. We are to fully understand the spiritual ramifications of everything going on around us and in the world. Sleeping and being awake is the perfect illustration for how we are to live every day. Not unaware of what is happening in our world, but understanding from a Biblical perspective, how we are to live.

Jesus' use here seems to be a combination of both of these concepts. Since those alive during the tribulation do not know when the day or hour of the Second Coming will be, again, though those alive who have become believers will have a rough idea, the command is given to 'be alert.' He then reiterates why ... 'for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.' Since His return will be sudden and bring about the final things before the millennium, those alive must be alert. This is a parallel command to Jesus' statement back in verse 24:36.

Since Jesus' has spoken of 'all these things' that will occur before His coming, those alive should be faithfully watching for the conclusion of all these things ... knowing that 'immediately after the tribulation of those days ...' the Son of Man will come. He then gives an illustration in verses 43–44.

⁴³ "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴ "For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*."

Let's hallucinate in our minds for just a second. Suppose we know what time a thief was going to come and break into our house. Would we be inclined to prepare for that? Yes, ... what would we do? We probably would not call the police and tell them "A thief is going to break into my house at 3:00 AM." We would ensure all our doors are locked, we would turn on exterior lights, cameras, etc. We would have our best baseball bat at the ready. We would have our dog by our side ... and we would wait up that night with a couple cups of coffee to stay alert. We would prepare for this event because we know when the thief is coming. Now, since Jesus has told them that they do not know the day or hour of His coming ... they are still to prepare and watchfully wait. Since they are waiting for the Second Coming, and judgment comes for the entire world after that (sheep/goat judgment next chapter), what is the best way that those alive during the tribulation can prepare? How about surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith? Get saved! Dr. Showers ¹ gives a nice summary of this exhortation ...

A homeowner does not know what a thief will come to rob his house. He could come anytime. So the homeowner must be watchful and prepared to prevent a break-in. Those who make it through the seven-year Tribulation should know that they are in the period of time immediately preceding Christ's return. So like the homeowner, they must watch and be prepared (by getting saved) for His advent because they do not know precisely when it will come.

So why the command from Jesus to stay alert? Who are those that are likely to be surprised by His coming? Unbelievers. It is unbelievers who will be sleeping (unprepared) for the entrance of the thief. They are not expecting the thief to come ... so they are going about their normal routine ... of sleeping at night. Jesus concludes this first illustration by reiterating His command.

"For this reason, you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will."

Now it does seem like Jesus has mostly unbelievers in mind here when He tells them to be ready. The coming of Christ will be so sudden that there will be no time for preparations after He comes. Likewise, in accord with the illustration ... it's too late to prepare for the thief if he is already crawling in your window. If the head of the house knew exactly when the thief was coming, he would not have a need to prepare until the last possible minute. He highlights these thoughts with a second illustration that not only reiterates the importance of watching and waiting in preparation, but also hints at reward for faithfulness during that period of time.

Matthew 24:45–51

⁴⁵ "Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷ "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; ⁵⁰ the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour which he does not know, ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus here gives an illustration of two types of slaves within a master's house. Apparently, they have each been given duties to perform on behalf of the master and each has a different attitude to his master's return. Jesus asks the questions ... 'which of these two is the faithful and sensible slave?' What do the terms mean? Faithful is a synonym for trustworthy; one who is dependable, reliable, and consistent. One who adheres firmly to the commands of the master of the house. Sensible simply means wise or prudent. One who is thoughtful in the quality of their life.

Notice which of these two slaves is blessed. The one doing what his master has set him in charge to do. He is prepared for the masters return by continuing in his assigned duties faithfully. Simple enough. Notice that there is a hint of reward after the coming of the master ... indeed ... 'he will put him in charge of all his possessions.' There will be reward for faithful living during

¹ Showers, Renald E., *The Sign of His Coming, Understanding the Olivet Discourse*, The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Bellmawr, NJ, 2016.

the tribulation period by those who have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ. Unlike Christians, who will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ (which is likely right after the rapture), those who come to faith in Christ during the tribulation will be rewarded after the second coming. More about this judgment later in chapter 25. But the point is that those who are faithfully watching and waiting for His return, by being ultimately prepared by salvation, and faithfully going about the Lord's business (evangelism, etc.), should expect to be rewarded going into the millennium.

What about the other slave? He says in his heart ... 'my master is not coming for a long time.' His approach is that he does not need to be watchful or prepared, since he believes his master is not coming for a long time ... or even at all. Since he is not expecting him to come soon, this slave mistreats the other slaves (including the faithful ones) and puts his lot in with drunkards. This is the perfect illustration of the unbeliever during the tribulation period. The unbeliever will not be concerned with the return of the Lord Jesus. They will go on living their lives in oblivious content ... like the days of Noah. But there may be something else here too. The text says they will beat their fellow slaves. It is certainly the case that unbelievers during the tribulation will generally not be prepared for the return of Christ; illustrated by the drinking. But is Jesus' warning believers here that they will certainly be persecuted by their own people? We know that the antichrist will persecute the Jews during the tribulation period. Is Jesus telling us that unbelieving Jews are likely to persecute the believing Jews during the tribulation? Will unbelieving Jews join in with the antichrist's persecution of the remnant Jews? Perhaps so ... but we don't want to push a simple illustration to meanings that are not intended. However, this concept may also be in view later in the parable of the sheep and the goats.

What is the ultimate consequence? Verse 50 ... 'the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him.' The consequence of not preparing with watchful and sober alertness is that the Lord Jesus will come to a mostly sleeping world. At His Coming, the faithful slaves will come as a Savior and King with millennial blessings to dispense; but for the evil slaves He will come as a judge and, as we will see, an executioner.

What will happen to the one who is unprepared for his master's return? He shall be separated for all eternity from the fellowship of believers. What is interesting here is the word used for 'punished' ... it is διχοτομέω, literally, 'to cut into two.' It came to mean punishment or judgment as an illustration of an ancient method of execution, the sawing of an individual into two; presumably while they were alive. What is a hypocrite? One who professes but one who possesses not. Since those who merely profess to be believers will be found out at the Second Coming and judged, the evil slave is representative of those alive during the second coming, who were not prepared for His return by heeding the message of salvation, and who will be judged in hell. Again, Showers gives an excellent summary of the illustration ... (paraphrase mine)

The second parable contrasts a faithful servant and an evil servant. The 'faithful and wise' servant is always prepared for his master's appearance. And when the master arrives, he rewards those who placed their faith in Him during the seven-year tribulation. They will receive the privilege of entering into the blessedness of God's millennial kingdom on Earth.

By contrast, the unfaithful, evil servant concludes his master is delaying his return home. So he abuses his authority by beating his fellow servants and carousing with drunkards. His master's early return surprises him. He had planned to give his master the false impression that he had properly administered his authority, but his master's return reveals the servant's evil heart and his extreme abuse of his given authority. As a result, the master "will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.

This unfaithful, evil servant represents the people who reject Christ during the tribulation or shortly thereafter, before His Second Coming. They will not be prepared for Christ's arrival to earth and, therefore, Christ will judge them severely when He comes. They will not be allowed to enter into the millennial kingdom that Christ will establish. Instead, they will be removed from the earth and cast into a terrible place of judgment where they will weep and gnash their teeth.

One final thought concerning the 'weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Did you ever consider that those two descriptions of the response of people to being in hell could be two different types of people. I recall hearing a sermon by R.C. Sproule once where he made a distinction between people in hell who would 'weep' versus those who would 'gnash their teeth.' He applied it to his own life and said (my paraphrase) ... 'if I have deceived myself during my entire life, and if I am indeed to be counted with

unbelievers in hell someday, then I will be one who will weep forever at my loss, for I understand that I am guilty before God and deserve His judgment.' However, the others will gnash their teeth at God in hatred of Him for what He has done to them. They will view His judgment as unfair to them and will curse Him even in their own judgment ... for all eternity.

To end on a slightly lighter note ... An old-fashioned, hell-and damnation preacher was scolding his congregation for their terrible misdeeds. "Remember what it says in the Bible," he thundered. "Jesus told us that for those who do evil there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." [Matthew 22:13] At this point the preacher saw a very old parishioner grinning up at him, [the old parishioner was] unconcerned, [because he was] toothless. The preacher then pointed at the grinning gums, "Don't worry, James Lippincott. Teeth will be provided!"

Matthew 24 – Final Conclusion

Jesus words here at the end of Matthew 24 were written to warn those Jews alive during that last generation of His coming; that they are to be prepared and waiting through the tribulation period ... with the ultimate preparation being the salvation of their souls. Though the words are meant for Jews during the tribulation period ... watching and waiting is a Pauline concept that applies to our lives as well; for we do not know when Christ will come back for the church in the rapture.

A great application though was once pronounced by J Vernon McGee²

This is a great principle which is applicable to every age. You and I ought to live our lives in the light of the fact that we are to stand in the presence of Christ. Note that I didn't say in the light of the coming of Christ but in the light of the presence of Christ. Regardless of whether Christ comes an hundred years from today or a thousand years, you and I will stand in His presence. Whether you are saved or lost, you will stand in His presence. If you are saved, you will have to give Him an account of your life to see if you receive a reward. If you are lost, you will stand there to be judged. Therefore, every person should live his life in light of the fact that he is to stand in the presence of the Lord. This is the great emphasis in the Olivet Discourse. Therefore, it has applications to us, although the interpretation is specifically to folk living at the time of Christ's return as King.

Remaining Schedule

May 19 – Matthew 25:1–30, parables of judgment, Ten Virgins, Talents

May 26 – Matthew 25:31–46, parable of judgment, Sheep and the Goats

June 2 – I will be preaching on the gathering of Matthew 24:31. Specifically, how are we to view the current nation of Israel as it pertains to prophetic fulfillment? Is it a fulfillment of the vision of the valley of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37?

² McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible*, at <https://www.studyLight.org/commentaries/eng/ttb/matthew.html>