THE FUTURE FORETOLD

Study Companion

WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN BEFORE JESUS RETURNS?

Primary Scriptures: Matthew 24:1–14, 36–46; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

Does the Bible give us a checklist of events that must happen before Jesus can return?

Does the gospel have to reach every nation?

Does the Antichrist have to appear?

Does the temple have to be rebuilt?

Does something still have to happen with Israel?

There are plenty of prophecy charts and timelines that attempt to put these events in order.

But before we build a timeline, there's a more important question:

What does Scripture actually tell us?

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Scripture gives us events and conditions to expect, but it does not give us a checklist that allows us to calculate when Jesus will return.

Jesus spoke about events surrounding the end. Paul did too.

But neither gave Christians enough information to circle a date on the calendar or confidently announce, “Everything has happened. Jesus must return now.”

Instead, Jesus repeatedly turns His followers' attention from **figuring out when** to **being faithful while they wait**.

KEY TAKEAWAY

> **Don't wait for the signs to start living ready.**

It's possible to become so focused on what still needs to happen that we miss what Jesus has already told us to do.

Biblical readiness doesn't begin when the final sign appears.

It begins now.

START WITH THE TEXT

Before working through the questions, read:

Matthew 24:1–14
Matthew 24:36–51
2 Thessalonians 2:1–12

As you read, try not to begin with a prophecy timeline you've seen or a theory you've heard.

Instead, ask:

What does the text actually say?

What does it not say?

What does Jesus want His followers to do because of what He has told them?

What was Paul trying to accomplish with believers who were frightened about the Day of the Lord?

You don't need a prophecy chart, a YouTube video, or someone else's theory to begin.

Start with the Bible.

Text first. Theory second.

LOOK CLOSER

1. Jesus Describes the Future—and Gives Instructions

Read **Matthew 24:4–14** again.

It's easy to read this passage and immediately begin making a list:

False messiahs.

Wars.

Famines.

Earthquakes.

Persecution.

False prophets.

Increasing wickedness.

The gospel preached throughout the world.

But look again.

Mixed among the things Jesus says will happen are instructions about how His followers should respond.

Look for them.

What does Jesus warn His followers about in **Matthew 24:4–5**?

What does He tell them in **Matthew 24:6**?

What does **Matthew 24:13** say about endurance?

Something to Notice

Jesus doesn't merely tell His disciples what to **watch**.

He tells them how to **live**.

Don't be deceived.

Don't be alarmed.

Stand firm.

Continue the mission.

That's important because prophecy can easily become an exercise in identifying events while overlooking the instructions Jesus placed right beside them.

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

2. Does the Gospel Have to Reach Everyone First?

One of the most frequently discussed verses in this conversation is **Matthew 24:14**:

> “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

At first glance, that might sound like a measurable countdown.

Once every person hears the gospel, the requirement is fulfilled and Jesus can return.

But look carefully at what Jesus actually says.

What phrase does Jesus use?

Does He say **every individual person** will hear the gospel?

Or does He speak about the gospel being preached **“in the whole world as a testimony to all nations”**?

Christians Don't All Agree

Christians have understood this statement in different ways.

Some understand Jesus to be referring primarily to the spread of the gospel throughout the world known to His first-century audience.

Others understand this as an ongoing worldwide mission that will reach every nation or people group before the end.

Still others see both a first-century fulfillment and a larger future fulfillment.

Those differences matter when we're trying to build a precise prophetic timeline.

But something is much clearer.

Jesus gave His followers a **mission**.

The church is supposed to take the gospel to the world.

So perhaps the most useful question isn't:

“How close are we to completing Matthew 24:14?”

but:

“Am I participating in the mission Jesus gave His church?”

ANOTHER PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

3. What About the “Man of Lawlessness”?

Read **2 Thessalonians 2:1–4**.

Something had frightened the believers in Thessalonica.

Somehow they had become convinced that:

> “the day of the Lord has already come.”

Notice Paul's response in verse 2.

He tells them not to become:

“easily unsettled or alarmed”

That sounds remarkably similar to Jesus' instruction in Matthew 24.

Paul then mentions two things:

a rebellion

and

the revelation of “the man of lawlessness.”

This passage has generated centuries of discussion about the Antichrist and the events surrounding Jesus' return.

But slow down and look at Paul's purpose.

What were these believers afraid had already happened?

What does Paul tell them not to become?

What events does Paul say will occur?

What questions does this passage **not** answer?

Something to Notice

Christians disagree about exactly who the “man of lawlessness” is, when he appears, and how this passage fits with other end-times passages.

Those are legitimate questions to study.

But don't miss what Paul is doing.

He's writing to **frightened Christians**.

He's not trying to make them more frightened.

He's trying to keep them from being deceived and unsettled.

That's an important principle for the way we study prophecy too.

PUT THE PIECES TOGETHER

4. What Does Jesus Say About Knowing When?

Now read **Matthew 24:36**:

> "But about that day or hour no one knows…"

Then continue through **Matthew 24:42–46**.

Notice the progression.

Jesus says they don't know when.

Then He tells them what to do because they don't know.

According to Matthew 24:42, why should they "keep watch"?

What is the faithful servant doing when the master returns in Matthew 24:46?

There's something important here.

We often want to know **when** so we'll know **when to get ready**.

Jesus reverses that.

You don't know when.

Therefore, live ready.

The uncertainty isn't a flaw in the message.

It's part of the point.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Sometimes a deadline changes the way we behave.

If something isn't due for another month, it's easy to think:

“I don't have to deal with that yet.”

Then a month becomes two weeks.

Two weeks becomes next week.

And suddenly we're scrambling.

Pastor Ruth shared in this week's message that she recognizes that tendency in herself.

Spiritually, we can do something similar.

If we become convinced that several prophetic events still have to occur before Jesus could possibly return, we may quietly begin thinking:

There's still time.

Take a moment to consider:

Is there an area of your spiritual life where you've been thinking, “I'll deal with that later”?

Is there a condition you've been waiting for before taking a step you already know you should take?

Maybe:

“When I have more time…”

“When things settle down…”

“When I know more…”

“When I'm less afraid…”

“When this problem is over…”

“When I see more signs…”

What might change if faithfulness wasn't something you were preparing for later, but something you practiced today?

YOUR PIVOT POINT

WHAT AM I WAITING FOR?

Read **Matthew 24:42–46** once more.

Jesus doesn't describe the faithful servant as someone who figured out exactly when the master would return.

He describes someone who was faithfully doing what the master had given him to do.

So identify **one thing**.

Something I know I should do:

The condition I've been waiting for:

One step I can take without waiting for that condition to change:

When I will take it:

You don't need another prophetic sign to obey something God has already made clear.

Don't wait for the signs to start living ready.

BEFORE YOU CLOSE YOUR BIBLE

Take one final look at what you've studied.

What does Scripture clearly tell us to expect before Jesus returns?

Where did you notice the difference between what the text says and conclusions people may draw from it?

What did Jesus and Paul repeatedly tell believers to do instead of becoming alarmed?

What is one truth from this study you want to carry into the coming week?

There are important things Scripture tells us about the future.

There are also details it doesn't give us.

We can study the unanswered questions without allowing them to distract us from the instructions Jesus has already made clear.

Text first. Theory second.

NEXT QUESTION

We've learned that Scripture gives us things to expect without giving us a countdown clock.

But one subject appears again and again in conversations about biblical prophecy:

WHY DOES ISRAEL MATTER?

God made promises to Abraham and his descendants.

The prophets spoke repeatedly about Israel.

Then, after centuries without a Jewish state, Israel became a modern nation in 1948.

Some Christians see that event as an extraordinary fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

Others believe Christians are reading modern events back into ancient promises.

So what does the Bible actually say about Israel's place in God's plan?

That's where we're going next in **The Future Foretold**.