

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 10

The Second Coming of the King At the End of the Age And the Signs that Precede His Second Coming

Matthew Chapter 24

Outline of Matthew Chapter 24

- 1A. The Prediction of Judgment and the Questions of the Disciples (24:1-3)
- 2A. The Events of Daniel's 70th Week and Especially the First Half of that Week (24:4-14).
- 3A. The Events Taking Place in the Middle of Daniel's 70th Week (24:15-20)
- 4A. The Great Tribulation or the Last Half of Daniel's 70th Week (24:21-28)
- 5A. The Second Coming of Christ (24:29-31)
- 6A. The Parable of the Fig Tree (24:32-35)
- 7A. Watchfulness Enjoined With Respect to the Lord's Second Coming (24:36-51)

The King is Coming!

The message of John the Baptist was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (near)" (Matthew 3:2). The Lord Jesus began His earthly public ministry by preaching the same message: "Repent for the kingdom is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). The preaching of this message is called the "preaching of the gospel (good news) of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23).

This was a message of good news and the good news had to do with the Kingdom which was **near** ("at hand"). The King Himself was present on earth. The Kingdom was something that the Jews looked for and longed for. They knew what the Kingdom was all about because the prophets (Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Micah and many others) all had much to say about the Kingdom. They knew that

it would be a time when there would be no wars on earth, when the Messiah would reign, when the wolf would dwell with the lamb, etc.

"The Kingdom is at hand!" This was good news for the Jews who were under the very difficult Roman rule and yoke. But there was part of the message which the Jews did not like. This was the "**repent**" part! This is what the great majority of the nation failed to do.

We learned from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) that there are certain spiritual requirements for entrance into the Kingdom. There is a "righteousness" which is required (Matt. 5:20). The Lord showed them that they lacked the righteousness which was required. The Jews were not spiritually qualified to enter the Kingdom.

In Matthew chapters 8-9 the Lord Jesus performed miracle after miracle (a series of 12 recorded miracles) showing that He was perfectly qualified as God's Messiah, as God's anointed King.

In Matthew chapter 10 the 12 disciples are sent forth and they are told to preach the same message, the same gospel of the Kingdom: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (10:7; see also 9:35). The key question was whether the Jewish people would repent. What would they do with their King—embrace Him or reject Him?

In our study of Matthew 11-12 we learned of the terrible rejection of Christ by the people of Israel. Notice the phrase in Matthew 11:20—"they repented not." The message was, "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," but "**they repented not.**" The establishment of the Kingdom depended upon the repentance of the people of Israel. Because the people did not repent and because they rejected their Messiah and King, the Kingdom was not established at this time.

Thus in Matthew 13 we have the "mysteries of the kingdom" which involved brand new revelation. This new revelation covered the period of time between the rejection of the Messiah and His return at the end of the age. God was revealing that there would now be an interval of time between the King's rejection and His coming back to earth to establish His Kingdom at the end of the age. The length of this interval is not revealed, but it has now been nearly 2000 years.

What would happen during this interval? What would happen during this time between the two comings of Christ? One of the most important things to happen during this time was revealed by the Lord in Matthew 16:18--"**I will build** (I will be building) **My church.**" God is visiting the nations of the world calling out a people for His Name (Acts 15:14).

After His obvious rejection by the Jewish people the Lord Jesus announced His coming death (Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). Would the death of Christ

mean the end of the Kingdom? No! The transfiguration was a picture or preview of the coming Kingdom given to three disciples (Matthew 17). The King would come one day **in power and great glory** (which is what Matthew chapter 24 is all about).

As the Lord marched to the cross His rejection became more and more obvious. Though it seemed that He was enthusiastically received at the triumphal entry, this was not a genuine reception (as we studied in the previous lesson). It was like the fig tree. From a distance it looked very promising, but upon closer inspection it was a great disappointment. The Jews did not want their Messiah. Their stubborn refusal and rejection of Christ is seen in Matthew 23:37--"**I would...but ye would not.**" Israel said NO to their God and their Messiah. The result was judgment: "Your house (the temple) is left unto you desolate."

But there was still hope for the future: A future generation of Jews (compare Matt. 21:43) will genuinely repent and call upon the name of the Lord (Matthew 23:39). It will be at that time that the nation will see their King!

The Olivet Discourse

Our Lord's teaching in Matthew chapters 24-25 has been called the "Olivet Discourse" simply because the Lord sat upon the Mount of Olives as He gave this important message about prophecy (verse 3). The Mount of Olives is a ridge of hills east of Jerusalem, and separated from Jerusalem by the Jehoshaphat Valley. The message is introduced in the first three verses. The Lord Jesus predicted a total destruction of the temple: "there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2).

After hearing this, four disciples (James, John, Peter and Andrew--Mark. 13:3) came to Jesus privately and asked Him two questions: **1) When shall these things be? 2) What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?**

This first question is not answered in Matthew's gospel but it is answered in Luke 21:20-24, which refers to the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. under General Titus.

This second question is answered in Matthew 24. In this chapter, the Lord Jesus gives us the **signs** of the Second coming which will take place just prior to the end of the age. The Lord's Second coming to earth at the end of the age should not take believers by surprise. It will be preceded by **signs**, and the signs point us to **the nearness of the event**: "so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:33).

Signs and No Signs

Someday the great King will come to this earth and set up His glorious Kingdom. When shall this be? How do we know if the time is drawing near for this great event to take place? What signs should we look for?

Consider the illustration of the Christmas holiday. The Christmas holiday is preceded by many signs (indications that tell you that Christmas is coming). [Have the students think of what some of these signs are.] When the stores start selling Christmas decorations, you know Christmas is coming. When you see homes decorated with lights at night you know Christmas is coming. When you see Christmas trees for sale you know Christmas is coming. When you see Santa you know Christmas is near. When you hear Christmas carols on the radio or on TV, you know Christmas is near. These signs are unmistakable. They point clearly to the coming of the Christmas holiday.

Likewise the signs mentioned in Matthew 24 anticipate the Second coming event, when Christ comes in power and great glory to this earth to be the earth's King. "When you see these things, know that it is near, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:33).

The teacher will need to help the students understand that there is a difference between the rapture of the church (described in John 14:3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Tit. 2:13 etc.) and the second coming to earth described in Matthew 24. The rapture takes place at least seven years before the second coming to earth. The second coming is preceded by definite signs, but the rapture is not announced by any signs. The rapture may take place at any time. Nothing needs to be fulfilled before the rapture takes place. God alone knows the time of this event and He has not revealed it to us.

The second coming is preceded by signs; the rapture is preceded by no signs. If we can liken the second coming to Christmas then we can liken the rapture to Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving comes before Christmas, just like the rapture comes before the second coming. Christmas is a holiday preceded by many signs, but Thanksgiving is a holiday that is generally without signs. People do not generally decorate their homes for Thanksgiving and they do not generally see too many tokens of Thanksgiving in the stores. Christmas is preceded by many signs but Thanksgiving is basically a sign-less holiday.

What do the signs of Christmas tell us? When we see the signs of Christmas we know that Christmas is getting near. But the signs of Christmas also tell us something else. When we see the first signs of Christmas they tell us that **Thanksgiving is very near**. Usually the signs of Christmas can be seen in stores even before Thanksgiving and this indicates two things: 1) Christmas is coming!

2) Thanksgiving is coming even sooner!

The application: When we see the signs of the second coming, these signs should tell us something about the nearness of the rapture. When we begin to see the signs of the second coming, then we know that the rapture is at hand because the rapture is an event which takes place at least seven years before the event that the signs are pointing to. The signs tell us that the second coming is near and that the rapture is even nearer.

Conditions Before the End

There are events that belong with the end of the age, and there are other events that take place before the end of the age. In Matthew 24:4-14 we have at least nine major characteristics of this period before the end:

- 1) false Christs (24:4-5)
- 2) wars and rumors of wars (24:6-7)
- 3) famines (24:7)
- 4) pestilence (24:7)
- 5) earthquakes (24:7)
- 6) many martyrs (24:8-10)
- 7) false prophets (24:11)
- 8) increasing evil and loss of fervent love (24:12)
- 9) worldwide preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom (24:13-14)

These are general signs which have generally characterized the period between the first and second comings of Christ, and these probably will become much more intensified as we draw closer to the close of the age.

There are two verses which indicate that these signs are not indicators of the very end of the age:

Verse 6—"all these things must come to pass but **the end is not yet.**" The end is still yet ahead! The end of the age has not yet arrived.

Verse 8—"All these are the **beginning** of sorrows." The term "sorrows" means

“birth pangs” or “birth pains.” The imagery is that of a woman in labor about to have a baby. When a woman first goes into labor there are pains, but they do not come as often and they are not as painful as they will be later. Later on close to the birth, the contractions come closer together and the pains are intensified and much greater. The things that Jesus described belong to the initial phase of birth pains (“the beginning of sorrows”), not to the end phase which will be more severe and much more intense.

Many see similarities between the things mentioned in Matthew 24:4-14 and the first four horses in Revelation chapter 6 (first four seals):

- 1) First horse—a false Christ (the Antichrist); Compare Matthew 24:5.
- 2) Second horse—war; compare Matthew 24:6.
- 3) Third horse—famine; compare Matthew 24:7.
- 4) Fourth horse—death; compare Matthew 24:9.

These seals break open during the first half of the tribulation period (the first 3½ years of Daniel’s 70th week).

The Great Tribulation

After the initial birth pains will come the very severe pains, and the Lord Jesus described an unparalleled time of trouble upon the earth. This great time of trouble is described by the Lord in verse 21: “For then shall be **great tribulation** (trouble, affliction, difficulty), such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

Notice that there has never been a time like this great tribulation. It will be the most difficult time the world has ever known. The Bible also teaches this in Daniel 12:1 and Jeremiah 30:7 which refers to this time as the great “time of trouble” and “the time of Jacob’s (Israel’s) trouble. Both of these passages also emphasize that this time will be unique in human history. It will be the most difficult period of history this world has ever experienced.

Help the students to think seriously about the full import of these words. Our world has gone through some very difficult times. There have been times of great famine and great hunger. There have been times when thousands have died from disease. In the 14th century about one-fourth of all the people in Europe (about 25 million people) died of a terrible disease which was called the “Black Death.” There have been terrible wars fought on Planet Earth, including **two great world wars**. This

world has also known some very cruel rulers such as Pharaoh who lived in the days of Moses and Nero who lived in the days of Paul and Peter and Hitler who lived in the 20th century and was a mass murderer. Great numbers of people have suffered under rulers such as these. There have also been terrible persecutions which have taken place in history (believers martyred under the Romans, later under the Spanish Inquisition, etc.). As for the Jewish people, think of the Holocaust when six million Jews were put to death in Europe.

In light of all these facts from history, how could the future be any worse? It's hard to imagine, yet the Lord clearly taught that the worst is yet to come. The world is headed for a time of trouble which it has never known before. Planet Earth has gone through some whirlwinds of trouble, but a great tornado is on its way!

The beginning of the great tribulation is marked by a key event mentioned in Matthew 24:15: "When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (in the tribulation temple in Jerusalem)."

This is when the Antichrist (the man of sin) will set up an image of himself in the temple of Jerusalem and demand the worship of himself. We learn about this event in Revelation chapter 13, 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and Daniel 9:27. This event will mark the beginning of great persecution for the Jewish people and they will need to flee Jerusalem for their lives (see also Revelation chapter 12).

The End of the Great Tribulation

The great tribulation will be brought to an end by the second coming of Christ to the earth (Matthew 24:29-31) where we are told that the second coming will take place "immediately after the tribulation of those days." The King of Kings will return to this earth to set up His Kingdom on this earth. Thus the worst time the world has ever known will be followed by the best time. The worst time is coming but the best days are still ahead. No matter how dark the days might get, true believers can pray, "Thy kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10).

The Length of the Great Tribulation

The best thing about the great tribulation is that it does not last for a long time. In Daniel 9:27 we learn about the final 7 years before Christ comes. It is described in terms of a "week" made up, not of seven days, but of seven years (a week of years). The abomination of desolation will take place in the middle of this week (the middle point of 7 years is 3½ years). From the middle of the week to the end of the week is also 3½ years, and this is the length of the great tribulation.

Even though the great tribulation will be a very difficult time to live, the good news is that it will be a very short time (it takes an average student four years to get through college, but the great tribulation will not even last that long). World War II was a very terrible and difficult war, but it only lasted five years. Most people do not enjoy sitting in the dentist's chair, but they know they will not sit there very long (maybe one or two hours at the most), so they endure it knowing that the time will soon pass. If they had to sit there for two or three days they would probably never do it! When we go through personal difficulties or trials sometimes it is encouraging just to remember that the trouble will not last forever. There is an end to it. God is very good to us to make times of trouble not last too long. This is the meaning of Matthew 24:22 ("except those days be **shortened**"). God will make this very difficult time **a short time** (compare Revelation 12:12, "a short time"). He will only allow it to last 3½ years, a brief 42 months (Revelation 11:2; 13:5).

There Will Be No Mistaking the Second coming; It Will Be Obvious!

From time to time we hear about a person who claims to be the Messiah, the Christ. The Lord told us to expect people to make such claims (Matthew 24:5,11,23,24). But Jesus also said, "**Believe it not!**" (v. 23). When the real Christ comes to earth there will be no mistaking it. The whole world will know! It will not be done in secret (verse 26), but it will be obvious to all (verse 27). Why is this so? Because Jesus will come "**in power and great glory**" (v.30) When Christ came to earth the first time, very few knew it. When He comes to earth the second time, all will know it. Every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7).

In **Matthew 24:26** "desert" signifies a remote place. You will not find the true Messiah out there in some deserted area. If someone claims that the true Messiah is located in some remote place, don't be deceived. Or, if they claim that He is to be found in secret chambers or in a private room, don't believe them. The Greek term "private room" is also found in Matthew 6:6 where the Lord was recommending private prayer, rather than public prayer for the purpose of being seen by men. The Lord's coming will not be a private affair, known by only a few people. You will not find Him in some secret location. On the contrary, His coming will be a public affair, known by everyone. "Every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7). The world will not miss this event. No one will say, "I wonder if the Lord has come back to earth?" It will be clear and obvious to all. His coming will not be obscure in any way.

Matthew 24:27 emphasizes this point further by using the illustration of a huge lightning storm, one that lights up the entire sky. A lightning storm is very public, very dramatic, very noisy, very spectacular, very hard to miss. The whole sky lights up. So also the Lord Jesus will come in power and great glory and there will be no mistaking His return. The whole world will witness this spectacular event.



Pay Attention to the Signs

The parable of the fig tree is mentioned in verses 32-33. The fig tree brings forth new leaves late in the spring, and thus the budding of the leaves is evidence that summer is near. In a similar way, when those living in the great tribulation see the signs predicted, they will know that the second coming of Christ is near (verse 33).

In verse 34 the expression "this generation" refers to the particular generation that will see the specific signs that are mentioned in this chapter, that is, the signs of the great tribulation. Thus this is referring to a future generation of people who will live to see these things. The same generation that will experience the great tribulation will also witness the second coming of Christ, because these events are closely connected in time (verses 29-30).

This chapter in Matthew talks of some very amazing events. Can we really believe this prophecy? How do we know that these events will truly come to pass? They were spoken nearly two thousand years ago and they have not been fulfilled yet. Can we be sure these things will really come to pass? "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but **my words** shall not pass away" (verse 35). What Jesus Christ says will definitely come to pass! God's Word will not fail! In fact, God's Word is an even more secure foundation than the very ground that is under our feet! The very earth we stand on will someday pass away (after the 1000 year Kingdom—see 2 Peter chapter 3), but God's Word will never pass away. God's predictions always come to pass. You can count on it! Those who don't count on God's Word are going to be caught unawares and unprepared, and this is the message of the remaining part of Matthew chapter 24.

Watch and be Ready!

According to verse 36, the Father, and only the Father knows the time of the second coming. This truth is restated in verse 42—"ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." And yet in spite of these clear statements, history is full of examples of people who try to set dates for the Lord's coming. These people presume to know more than the Father!

Setting dates for the Lord's coming is not wise, especially when our Saviour told us that no man knows the day or the hour of the Lord's coming. Harold Camping was a nationally known radio host (Family Radio) and he foolishly predicted the exact date of the Lord's return: May 21, 2011. He also taught that the end of the world would occur five months later, on October 21, 2011. He erected billboards all over the country which stated that the Bible guaranteed these presumptuous predictions. Of course, both of these predictions proved to be wrong, and Mr. Camping was greatly embarrassed.

The Lord warned against foolish date-setting when He taught that no one knows the day or the hour of His return (Matthew 24:36). This was not the first time that Harold Camping predicted the time of Christ's return. His earlier false prophecy was that Jesus Christ would return on or between September 15, 1994 and September 27, 1994. He was wrong then and he should have learned the lesson that date setting is a foolish practice. Camping failed to learn his lesson from his first failed prediction. How unwise to try to announce that which God has chosen not to reveal. God has not told us the time. He wants us to be ready always.

There have been many other date setters in history. Edgar Whisenant wrote a book entitled, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988*. Of course, the Lord did not come in 1988 so he presented his new theory: *89 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Take Place in 1989*. Someone humorously surmised that the added reason given in the new book might be this: "Reason #89—Because He did not come in 1988."

Jehovah's Witnesses taught that the second coming of Christ took place in 1914. Other cults have likewise engaged in date setting, even though our Lord warned against doing this.

The time of the rapture is unknown. It could happen at any time. Only God knows the time. We need to be ready all the time. "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44).

The Days of Noah

The coming of the Son of man is compared to the days of Noah. The key to

understanding this is found in verse 39. The unsaved living in the days of Noah did not believe God's message through Noah and thus they were not ready for the destruction that was coming upon them. When the flood came it was too late for them to do anything about it. The flood "**took them all away.**" The flood took them all away in judgment. They were removed from the earth and only eight people remained on the earth.

Verses 40-41 speak of "one taken and the other left." At first glance this seems to be a description of the rapture of the church. We know that when the rapture takes place there will be some who will be instantly taken (like Enoch of old) and others who will be left to remain on the earth. Who are the ones taken and who are the ones left?

At the rapture the ones taken will be those who are true believers. They will be taken up and caught up to meet the Lord in the air (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). They will be suddenly removed from the earth. The ones left will be those who are unsaved. They will not be taken but they will remain on earth to enter into the days which will then come upon the earth which will probably include the tribulation period. There is a space of time between the rapture and the tribulation period, though we don't know how long a space of time this will be. It will probably not be too long. The tribulation period does not begin with the rapture; rather it begins with the treaty or covenant which the man of sin will make with Israel--Daniel 9:27. So at the time of the rapture, the saved are taken to heaven and the unsaved are left on this earth.

Consider the days of Noah. Who was taken and who was left (see verse 39)? All of the unsaved were taken away in the day of the great flood. They were removed by the judgment of the flood. Those who were saved were Noah and his family. They were "left." They remained on the earth in order to repopulate the earth. The Lord's second coming to the earth is likened to the days of Noah. When Jesus Christ comes to the earth at the end of the tribulation, those who are not believers will be judged and removed from the earth (see for example, Matthew 25:41,46). However, those who are saved will remain on the earth and will enter into the millennial Kingdom and will repopulate the earth (see for example, Matthew 25:34). Thus at the second coming the wicked will be taken away and removed in judgment. This is confirmed by the passage in Luke 17:36-37 which asks the question, "Where will they be taken?" The answer seems to indicate that they will be taken away into judgment, not blessing. When the King returns, the righteous will be left on the earth to enter the Kingdom. Thus what we have at the second coming is the exact reverse of what will take place at the rapture. At the rapture the righteous are taken to heaven and the unsaved are left (they remain on earth to enter the time of tribulation). When the Lord returns after the tribulation it is the unsaved who are taken in judgment and the righteous who are left to enter the Kingdom. This truth demonstrates that the rapture and the second coming cannot be the same event (as posttribulationists would claim).

This same truth is well illustrated in the parable of the tares in Matthew 13 (see especially the explanation found in Matthew 13:40-43). Here we see that the wicked are gathered out of the Kingdom and cast into fire (they are taken and removed from earth), but the righteous shall shine in the Kingdom (they will remain on earth; they will "be left"). This will take place at the end of the age (verse 40).

Don't be Caught by Surprise

A thief breaks into a house to steal when people least expect him (v. 43). He tries to come when no one is expecting him and no one is looking for him. He might even come when people are sleeping.

Unsaved people are in a spiritual sleep. They are not aware of what is taking place. They have refused to listen to God's Word which clearly tells us about these important prophetic events. If you do not think this is true, think about your own unsaved friends at school, at work, etc. How much do they know about these things we have talked about in Matthew 24? How much are they aware of the great tribulation? How much do they know about the Antichrist? Do they understand these prophecies? Do they take these things seriously? Do they live their lives as though these things will surely come to pass? *Do you?*

May we learn to live expectantly—expecting God's Word to come to pass just like God said it would!

Notes For Further Study

Matthew 24:3. "Thy coming" and "the end of the age" are two phrases that are linked together by the Greek construction (the Granville-Sharp Rule). The Lord's coming spoken of in this verse will take place at the end of the age. The KJV translation is "world," but the Greek word is better translated "age." This present age comes to an end as the Kingdom age dawns.

Matthew 24:6. There are two things which will be with us until the end of the age (until the King comes): **wars** (Matthew 24:6) and **poverty** (Matthew 26:11—For ye have the poor always with you).

Matthew 24:11. Of the many false prophets one will emerge as the chief false prophet (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Of the many false Christs (Matt. 24:5), one will emerge to be the chief false Christ who will be known as the Antichrist (the Beast).

Matthew 24:12. "Iniquity" means "lawlessness." See 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 where the Antichrist is called the "lawless one."

Matthew 24:13. Those who endure to the end will be delivered by the Messiah (Jeremiah 30:7).

Matthew 24:14. The “gospel of the kingdom” is a phrase used elsewhere only in three places: Matthew 4:23; 9:35 and Mark 1:14. The content of the gospel of the Kingdom is explained in Mark 1:5—“And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the gospel.” At Christ’s first coming the Kingdom was announced as being “at hand” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7), but the Jews rejected the King and His message and the Kingdom was postponed. During the future time of tribulation (Daniel’s 70th week), the Kingdom will once again be announced as being “at hand” or near. The announcement that the Kingdom was near originally was given only to the Jews (Matthew 10:5-6), but during the tribulation that message will go out to the whole world (Matthew 24:14). This worldwide proclamation will be the result of the ministry of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3) as well as the 144,000 witnesses (Rev. 7:4-8), and even angels will assist in getting the message out to everyone (Rev. 14:6). Because of progressive revelation, the content of “the gospel of the kingdom” during its tribulation phase will certainly include the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Matthew 24:16-20. For this flight of the Jews into the mountains during the beginning of the great tribulation, compare Revelation 12:6,14-17. The “mountains” mentioned in verse 16 probably refer to the Transjordan mountains, where Pella was located. According to Eusebius, Christians in Jerusalem fled to that area during the Roman siege shortly before 70 A. D. Some Bible scholars believe Petra (the ancient capital of Edom) will be the hiding place of the Jews during the last 42 months of Daniel’s 70th week.

Matthew 24:22. The verb “shortened” means to “mutilate, curtail, shorten, lop off, cut off, abridge, amputate.” These days were not prolonged, but rather they were cut short. The expression “those days” (Matthew 24:22) refers back to verse 21 (those days of great tribulation). The Lord had just predicted a time of unparalleled and unprecedented tribulation upon the earth (verse 21). Those days are said to be so difficult that if they were to be prolonged, then no flesh would be saved (verse 22). God, in mercy, shortens those days for the sake of His elect (verse 22). How should we understand the shortening by God of the time of the Great Tribulation? **The world because of its wickedness and rejection of Jesus Christ deserves a much longer time of great tribulation** (which we understand to include the wrath of Almighty God). God in His mercy cuts short the time when His greatest fury will be unleashed upon the earth. God in mercy gives man a shorter period of time—only 42 months, only 1260 days. This same period of time is referred to in Revelation 12:12 where the devil himself recognizes it as a short time: “the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that **he hath but a short time.**” He knows he has just a **little** time! Thus the prophetic Scriptures refer to those last 3½ years as a very short period of time (compare also Rev. 17:10 with Rev. 13:5 where we are told that

Antichrist's reign will continue 3½ years—"a short space"). If God had prolonged this time then no flesh would be saved.

Matthew 24:29. The Lord's second coming will be preceded by the darkening of the sun and moon so that all the world's attention will be focused on the coming of the Son of Man in resplendent glory.

Matthew 24:31. The interpreter must not identify this verse with the rapture of the church. This is a post-tribulational event, while the rapture is a pre-tribulational event. What is described in this verse is a gathering of God's elect Jews from the four corners of the earth. This event was prophesied repeatedly in the Old Testament. See Isaiah 45:4; Ezekiel 5:10; Zechariah 2:6; Isaiah 11:12; 43:5-6; Deuteronomy 30:4-5; Isaiah 27:12-13. In a Jewish prayer book is found this prayer: "Sound the great trumpet. Gather us from the four corners of the earth." The Church and the Jews have one thing in common. They are both looking for the trumpet (though their respective trumpets will sound at different times).

Matthew 24:36. No man living today knows the day or hour of our Lord's coming to earth. However, once the treaty is signed between the Antichrist and Israel (the covenant mentioned in Daniel 9:27), then a person who knows the Bible can predict the day of the Lord's coming. The signing of this treaty marks the beginning of Daniel's 70th week, and the Lord's coming will take place at the end of this week (a week made up of seven years). This "week" is divided into two halves, each three and a half years long (each half being 42 months or 1260 days). Thus the second coming will occur 2520 days (1260 X 2) after the signing of the treaty.

Matthew 24:51. See our detailed study entitled *Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth—Will This be the Fate of True Believers?* This phrase refers to the punishment of the wicked. It does not refer to saved people feeling remorse or shame.