

QUESTIONS CHRISTIANS ASK
HOW SHOULD WE INTERPRET GOD'S CALENDAR?
MATTHEW 24:3-14



The Heart of the Matter

Today's world seems fascinated by and preoccupied with the future. Bestselling books are often those that offer predictions and warnings concerning future events. Astrology continues to captivate people by the millions. Even the film and television industries have made a bundle from science fiction and futuristic fantasy ideas dreamed up in the minds of imaginative producers. But invariably, one major subject is overlooked or denied altogether—the return of Jesus Christ. Few things are more clearly set forth in all of Scripture. This single prediction is woven through the teachings of Christ, especially during His final months of ministry, as well as the writings of the apostles. In this section of Matthew's gospel, Jesus is with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, just east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley. They are full of questions, and He graciously responds to their concerns.



Discovering the Way

1. What Gives World Missions Its Urgency?

Christians often talk about the importance of evangelism, both at home and around the world. Our churches send out short-term teams to other nations to share the gospel as well as recruit those who stay behind to pray and give financially. But what gives this crucial mission its urgency? In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus reminded us that our evangelistic efforts have a deadline. Often Christians forget that time is running out for those who don't yet know Christ and that their eternity is at stake. Jesus urges us, the workers in God's field, to get busy harvesting the world for Christ. Because when Jesus returns, world missions will come to an end.



Tools for Digging Deeper



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2. Then How Are We to Interpret Current Events? (Matthew 24:3–14; 2 Peter 3:1–4)

Matthew 24 opens with the disciples seeking to speak with Jesus privately. They asked Him three questions because they wanted to know how they would recognize Jesus's return. They already knew that an indefinite period of time would separate His departure and His return. The disciples knew Jesus would fulfill His promise; they just didn't know when. Jesus responded with an answer that unfolds throughout Matthew 24. It includes a warning, signs to watch for, and predictable end-times events.



GETTING TO THE ROOT

***The Rapture*¹**

Wouldn't it be great if we could take a peek over God's shoulder and catch a quick glance at His prophetic calendar? In a way, we can. Though the Bible doesn't give the exact dates and times of future events, serious students of Scripture can pretty much determine the order of events to come. And the next event on God's prophetic calendar is the rapture.

The word *rapture* never occurs in the Bible but comes from the phrase "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. And though the rapture hasn't occurred yet, it could at any moment.

Jesus made it clear in John 14:1–3 that those who take part in the rapture will be only those who choose to believe in Him while they're alive on earth. On that great catching-up day, Christ will take His followers from earth to live with Him in heaven during the seven years of tribulation that will occur on earth. They will, in the words of Jesus, escape the "hour of testing" (Revelation 3:10). On that glorious day, Jesus will "descend from heaven" with a loud command, an angelic shout, and blaring trumpets,

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bringing with Him the souls of New Testament saints (1 Thessalonians 4:16). At the Lord's command, the physical bodies of those "who have fallen asleep . . . in Christ" will rise to reunite with their souls (4:15, 16). And then all who have committed their lives to Jesus, who are alive at the time of the rapture, "will be caught up" to meet Him "in the air" (4:17).

All of this will take place "in the twinkling of an eye." Christians will exchange our old, earthly bodies for new, heavenly ones (1 Corinthians 15:51-55) and will live in the Lord's presence forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What a wonderful message of hope for all who follow Christ (4:13, 18).



Starting Your Journey

So how can we develop a sense of urgency for a world without Christ? First, we should recognize that the goal of history is to display God's glory and that He stands at the center of its unfolding events. Second, we must catch a world vision by understanding that Jesus didn't die for a certain ethnicity or for one country; He died for the entire world. It's easy for us to sit back and think that we have plenty of time to tell our neighbors, relatives, and coworkers about Christ. But we don't know when Jesus will burst onto the scene and carry out divine judgment.

Do you feel a sense of urgency to share the gospel? Do you truly care about the eternal destinies of others? If not, pray that God would burden your heart with the truth that time is running out.

ENDNOTE

1. Adapted from Insight for Living, *End Times Prophecy Passport* (Plano, Tex.: IFL Publishing House, 2011), 4.