

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Commission: A Study of Matthew 21–28

STUDY NINE

First Glimpses of the Last Days

Matthew 24:1–14

Something deep within longs to know what it will be like in the future. No better teacher ever lived than the Son of God, and in His Olivet Discourse, He lays out a survey of the events that leads to the end of the world.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As the sun set on a long day of teaching, Jesus and His disciples left the temple area, walked through the Kidron Valley, and ascended the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. Just a few days earlier, Jesus had ridden a donkey into Jerusalem along this same path, accompanied by the cheers of an adoring crowd:

“Praise God for the Son of David!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!” (Matthew 21:9)

Now, as He retraced this route on foot, His heart bowed with sorrow. Because the leaders of the nation had rejected Jesus as their messiah, judgment instead of blessing would rain down on the people Jesus loved.

However, a glimmer of hope shone through Jesus' final words before He left the temple:

“For I tell you this, you will never see me again until you say, ‘Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!’” (23:39, emphasis added).

The word *until* assured a future reception of Jesus as King.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

First Glimpses of the Last Days

Matthew 24:1–14

A day would come, far in the future, when Jesus would reenter Jerusalem. This time, though, He would come not on a donkey, humble and gentle, but on the clouds, powerful and glorious. Then, all people will shout, “*Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*” Upon His return, every knee will bow and tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Despite His heartache over past events, Jesus looked to the future as He departed Jerusalem. He had one more teaching to give to His disciples when He crested the Mount of Olives. His subject? The end of the world.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do you feel discouraged because our world rejects Jesus and His values? Through this *Searching the Scriptures* study and the next two, Jesus’ teaching will lift your eyes to a glorious horizon beyond the trials of this age. Take a moment to pray for insight and reassurance as you take a glimpse at the last days through Jesus’ teaching.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

While Jesus’ thoughts were fixed on the future, His disciples were transfixed by the here and now. Take a few moments to read [Matthew 24:1–14](#), which opens with the disciples admiring the temple and its massive white stones aglow in the light of the setting sun.



Observation: Six Signs That Signal the End

What did Jesus say when the disciples “pointed out to him the various Temple buildings” ([Matthew 24:1–2](#))? According to Mark’s account, the disciples gaped, “Teacher, look at these magnificent buildings! Look at the impressive stones in the walls” (Mark 13:1).¹



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Jesus' shocking prophecy must have set the disciples' minds awirl. What two questions did they ask Jesus, and why do you think they waited until a private moment to ask them (*Matthew 24:3*)?

Jesus set aside their first question about “when” until later in His discourse. He answered their second question with six signs that signal His return and the end of the world. In the following chart, write down what you observe about these six signs.

Verses	Signs
24:4–5	
24:6–7a	
24:7b–8	
24:9	
24:10–13	
24:14	



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What repeated themes do you see weaving through Jesus' prophetic tapestry?

What sign of hope contrasts the waves of violence?

I suggest that angels will be dispatched worldwide to make a final public proclamation of the good news of Christ, announcing all who will turn their lives over to Christ will be born into God's family and, ultimately, preserved for eternity. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Sequence of End Times Events

Based on the Jewish understanding of Old Testament prophecy, the disciples likely assumed that the destruction of the temple could only mean the end of the world as they knew it. According to commentator J. Dwight Pentecost:

In Jewish eschatology two ages were recognized: the first was this present age, the age in which Israel was waiting for the coming of the Messiah; the second was the age to come, the age in which all of Israel's covenants would be fulfilled and Israel would enter into her promised blessings as a result of Messiah's coming. The present age would be terminated by the appearance of Messiah, and the coming age would be introduced by His advent. The present age, then, was to end in judgment, and the coming age must be preceded by this devastation.²



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So, from the disciples' perspective, the destruction of the temple signaled the onset of God's final judgments, and the messianic age would immediately follow. From Jesus' perspective, however, "the end won't follow immediately" (Matthew 24:6). Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed in AD 70, but *the tribulations of the day of the Lord would come much later*.

First, the Holy Spirit must come upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, launching the church age. According to Luke's account, Jesus called this period "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24 NASB). "The times of the Gentiles" refers to our present period, in which God offers a window of opportunity for Gentiles to receive the Savior whom the Jews rejected. Once this time is fulfilled, the church age will end and the judgments of the day of the Lord will commence.

A firm grasp of this sequence of ages is key to interpreting Jesus' prophecies. In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains where the events that Jesus described in Matthew 24:1–14 fit. Peruse pages 204–207 and summarize what you learn.

Jesus' descriptions of deception, wars, natural disasters, and persecution sound like headlines in today's newspaper, don't they? Jesus, though, was looking further into the future than our current times. How should we understand Jesus' prophecies today?

Jesus lays out a survey of the events that lead to the end of the earth. Let me reassure you that if you know Christ as your Savior, you will not go through any of this. It is all future to our day. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: The Rapture of the Church

Because members of the early church endured violent persecution from vicious rulers, they feared the day of the Lord had begun!

What did Paul say in *2 Thessalonians 2:1–8* to reassure them?

While “lawlessness is already at work” in our world, the influence of the Holy Spirit in the church restrains evil from taking total control. According to *1 Thessalonians 4:16–17*, what will Jesus do for His followers to rescue us “from the terrors of the coming judgment” (*1 Thessalonians 1:10*)?

Christ's rapture of the church removes the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit, unleashing the horrors of the tribulation. While the church remains on earth, we can be certain that the day of the Lord has not begun.

Scripture teaches that the next event of the future for us will be the rapture of the church. That's when the Holy Spirit removes His restraining power. What follows will be such devastation, such misery as the mind can hardly imagine. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: A Promise for the Future

In the remainder of Matthew 24 through chapter 25, Jesus leads us deeper into the apocalyptic world to come. As you travel into these nightmarish scenes, remember your security in God, who “is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault” (Jude 1:24).

In the “keeping” power of God, we know we are safe. How has God kept you in His care in recent trials?

Because our lives are safely “hidden with Christ in God,” we can be certain that when Christ comes in glory, we “will share in all his glory” (Colossians 3:3–4). What hope does this promise give you today to endure your present circumstances?

What keeps us stable today is the same solid bedrock of truth that has kept Christians steady throughout history during the worst times: *the hope of Christ's return*. Fix your eyes on a future filled with the glory of our returning King, the One at whose name every knee will bow.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for holding my future secure in an insecure world. Your promise to keep me from falling gives me confidence to press on. Hold me close to Your side during chaotic days when everything around me seems to collapse. Shelter me in Your refuge and keep me safely hidden with Christ under Your care. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. The temple “was built of white marble plated with gold, and it shone in the sun so that a man could scarcely bear to look at it. . . . The Temple area was surrounded by great porches, Solomon’s Porch and the Royal Porch. These porches were upheld by pillars, cut out of solid blocks of marble in one piece. They were 37 ½ feet high, and of such a thickness that three men linked together could scarcely put their arms round them. At the corners of the Temple angle stones have been found which measure from 20 to 40 feet in length, and which weigh more than 100 tons. How they were ever cut and placed in position is one of the mysteries of ancient engineering. Little wonder that the Galilean fisherman looked and called Jesus’s attention to them.” William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 305.
2. J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 398.

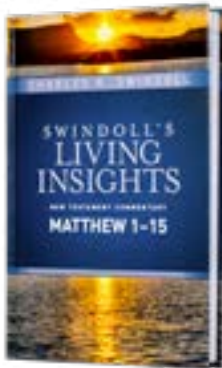


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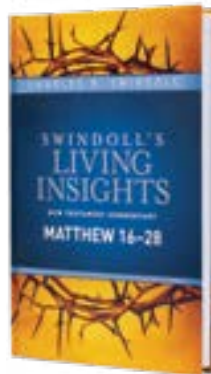
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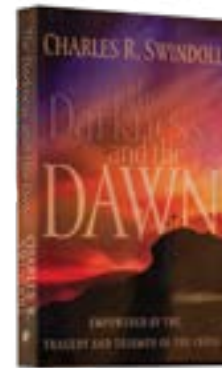
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2021 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

