

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY ONE

That's Who? Riding on What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

Jesus entered Jerusalem in a way no one could miss. He was riding on the back of a donkey, and the crowd was shouting and praising God. Jesus was living out prophecy . . . what a great moment!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN Matthew began recording the final days of Jesus' earthly life, he must have put down his stylus, closed his eyes, and taken a deep breath in a moment of awe. Sacred, profound scenes awaited him of the period of Jesus' life now known as Holy Week.

Matthew had been building up to the events of this week. In Matthew 1–2, he covered the first thirty years of Jesus' life. In 3–20, he featured snapshots from Jesus' three years of ministry. Then, in 21–28, he slowed his pace to detail each event surrounding Jesus' passion and death, devoting a third of his gospel to just one week.

Indeed, this was a week like none other, one that remains fixed at the pinnacle of history. God's Spirit moved Matthew to take his time, to write slowly and carefully about the events that occurred from Sunday to Sunday, from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to His triumphant resurrection from the grave.

Matthew included every key moment of Jesus' passion: His agony in Gethsemane, the treacherous betrayal, Jesus' trials and torture, and His last gasp on the cross. The Lamb of God had come to suffer for sin and be raised in victory. This was the reason the Savior was born and is the heart of Matthew's message to the world.

As we step into this sacred space, we, too, must take our time, read slowly, and pause often to let the wonder in. Palm Sunday begins our journey where we'll join throngs of jubilant people walking with Jesus as He rides a donkey down a dusty road to Jerusalem.



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That's Who? Riding on What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Begin by inviting the Lord to stir your heart with love for Jesus and to lift your spirit with the magnitude of His sacrifice on your behalf.

Father, all that came before in Matthew's gospel has led me to the dramatic events of Holy Week. As I step across this threshold, help me enter the scenes with my heart fully receptive to Your Spirit's movement in me. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As we open Matthew 21, we walk across a thematic bridge—Jesus' statement to His disciples at the end of chapter 20, "Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

For more than three years, Jesus served His people by healing the sick, performing miracles, and teaching. Now at the triumphal entry, Jesus formally presents Himself to His people as their humble servant, their King who is willing to spill His divine blood for their sakes. Before digging into the passage, review Pastor Chuck Swindoll's chart on Matthew below and see where our passage fits in the flow of the whole book.



That's Who? Riding on What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

MATTHEW

	<div>Announcement and Arrival of the King</div> <div>Main Emphasis: His Credentials</div> <div><div><div><u>Birth</u></div><div><u>Baptism</u></div><div><u>Temptation</u></div></div></div> <div>CHAPTERS 1–4</div>	<div>Proclamation and Reception of the King</div> <div>Main Emphasis: His Message</div> <div><div><div><u>Sermon on the Mount</u></div><div><u>Miracles</u></div><div><u>Discourses</u></div><div><u>Parables</u></div></div></div> <div>CHAPTERS 5–15</div>	<div>Opposition and Rejection of the King</div> <div>Main Emphasis: His Suffering and Death</div> <div><div><div><u>Spread of opposition</u></div><div><u>Preparation of disciples</u></div><div><u>Final predictions</u></div><div><u>Crucifixion</u></div></div></div> <div>CHAPTERS 16–27</div>	<div>Resurrection and Triumph of the King</div> <div>Main Emphasis: His Conquest</div> <div><div><div><u>God’s power</u></div><div><u>Great Commission</u></div></div></div> <div>CHAPTER 28</div>
The King	His identity: Israel’s promised King		His destiny: “Crucify Him!”	
Scope	Teaching the vast multitudes		Teaching the Twelve	
Location	Bethlehem and Nazareth	Ministry in Galilee	Ministry in Judea	
People’s Reaction	Increased popularity		Increased hostility	
Theme	Jesus is the King, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah.			
Key Verses	16:16–19; 28:18–20			
Christ in Matthew	Jesus, the Messiah, fulfills the prophecies, promises, types, and expectations of the Old Testament Scriptures (16:16–19; 28:18–20).			

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Observation: Preparing, Fulfilling, Responding

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we highlight key locations, nouns, and actions.¹ Let's use our observation skills to view the passage from three angles: Jesus preparing to enter Jerusalem, His fulfillment of messianic prophecy, and the people's responses to their King.



That's Who? Riding on What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

Preparing to Enter—Matthew 21:1–3

Jesus usually traveled by walking, but this time, He purposefully chose to enter Jerusalem riding a donkey—and not just any donkey. According to [Matthew 21:1–3](#), what specific instructions did Jesus give two disciples?



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Jesus traveled from Jericho to Bethany and then to Bethphage. Find these cities on the maps in the back of your Bible. You can also locate the cities by going to the map titled, “[Bethany, Jerusalem, Emmaus, Mount of Olives, and Jerusalem](#),” at [insight.org](#). Take a few minutes to follow Jesus’ route from Jericho to Bethany (where Jesus stayed in the home of Lazarus, John 12:1–11), Bethphage, and Jerusalem.

Thousands of Passover pilgrims followed Jesus’ route to Jerusalem. Only Jesus, however, caused so much excitement. Why?

Fulfilling Messianic Prophecy—Matthew 21:4–5

According to [Matthew 21:4–5](#), what messianic prophecy did Jesus fulfill by entering Jerusalem as He did? Look carefully at the details of this verse. Note who was foretold to ride what and the characteristics of this person.



That's Who? Riding on What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

In the interpretation section, we'll dig into the significance of Jesus' fulfillment of this prophecy. For now, let's observe the ways three groups of people received Jesus.

Responding to the King—Matthew 21:6–11

In [Matthew 21:6–7](#), what did the *disciples* do and why?

The *crowd* consisted of followers of Jesus who may have been Galilean pilgrims who had witnessed Jesus' messianic ministry. What did they shout, according to [21:8–9](#)? Notice how they surrounded Jesus as He descended the Mount of Olives, walking with Him and not simply watching Him pass by as if viewing a parade.

Pilgrims often sang their way to Jerusalem for festivals. But this crowd shouted. “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Matthew 21:9 NASB)! The whole spectacle put “the *entire city* . . . in an uproar” (21:10, emphasis added). In [21:10–11](#), what were they asking, and how did Jesus' followers answer?



That's Who? Riding on What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

Until now, Jesus had stayed out of the limelight. Remember how often He said after healing someone, “Don’t tell anyone about this.” Now, He enters the limelight as if to say, “Don’t hold back. Let your praise sound forth. I’m coming as your Messiah.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Triumphal Entry

Let's dig into the meaning of Jesus' triumphal entry.

A Public Entrance

Jesus usually discouraged publicity, telling His disciples “not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah” (Matthew 16:20). Once, He slipped away from a crowd wanting to make Him king (John 6:15). Yet, this Passover was different. Why was Jesus going public now?

Riding a Young Donkey

Why did Jesus ride a young donkey? Why not a horse like most kings? What unmistakable claim was Jesus making about His *identity* and His *intentions*, according to [Zechariah 9:9–10](#)? For help with the answer, read pages 140–141 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](#) at netbible.org.



That's Who? Riding on What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

Receiving Praise

The crowd called Jesus a kingly name, “Son of David” followed by the kingly honor of spreading their garments and branches before Him (see [2 Kings 9:13](#)). In addition, He received praise as the people shouted, “Hosanna.” According to Pastor Chuck, “Hosanna” is a “one-word prayer that means, ‘O Lord, save now!’ It was a petition for deliverance from oppression.”²

What is the significance, for them back then and for us today, of Jesus receiving these words and gestures of praise?

In a word familiar to every Jew, Hosanna, this messianic expectation is now at the point of realization. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Pharisees' Anger

Not surprisingly, Jesus' actions angered the Pharisees. They heard the people showering Jesus with praise: “Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!” (Matthew 21:9). This line comes directly from Psalm 118, which is a song of thanks for God's protection, praise for His power over the nations, and a plea for salvation.

Read this quote and its context in [Psalm 118:25–28](#). According to Luke's account, how did the Pharisees react to Jesus receiving this blessing ([Luke 19:38–39](#))?



That's Who? Riding on What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

What did Jesus' response communicate to the Pharisees, according to [19:40](#)?

Now, all the actors had made their entrance—Jesus at centerstage, His closest disciples, a crowd of adoring followers, the curious Passover masses, and the hateful religious leaders who would stop at nothing to kill Jesus. The drama of Holy Week had now begun.



Application: What about Us?

The groups surrounding Jesus related to Him with a range of responses:

1. The disciples *served* Jesus.
2. The crowd *praised* Jesus.
3. The pilgrims *sought out* Jesus.
4. The unbelieving Pharisees *sneered at* Jesus.

We may resemble any of these groups during different seasons of our spiritual journey. But the person who we truly long to emulate is the one at the center, the humble king who came in peace to the City of Peace to make peace between God and humankind.

Here is a list of qualities Jesus displayed at His triumphal entry.

1. **Courage:** Jesus walked directly into a deadly storm knowing the danger.
2. **Humility:** Jesus arrived as King to serve His people.
3. **Peacefulness:** Jesus came on a mission of peace.
4. **Surrender:** Jesus submitted Himself to the Father's plan.



That's Who? Riding on What? Why?

Matthew 21:1–11

In what current circumstances would you like to ask Jesus for help to display these qualities like He did?

Commit this situation to the Lord as you seek His strength today. Then close your study in praise. It doesn't have to be Palm Sunday for you to wave your branches and sing *hosannas*. For your final prayer, use the hymn below to help you lay your life in surrender before the King of Kings.



A FINAL PRAYER

All Glory, Laud and Honor³

All glory, laud, and honor
To Thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring:
Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest,
The King and blessed one! . . .

To Thee, before Thy passion,
They sang their hymns of praise;
To Thee, now high exalted,
Our melody we raise:
Thou didst accept their praises—
Accept the praise we bring,
Who in all good delightest,
Though good and gracious King!

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at insight.org. This page provides you an introduction to four important methods in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 142.
3. Theodulph of Orleans, trans. John M. Neale, "All Glory, Laud and Honor," *Hymns for the Family of God* (Nashville: Paragon, 1976), hymn 249.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY TWO

When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22

Jesus did what was right even though it enraged the leaders. He was a marked man, but here He was, cleansing the temple. We have to admire Him.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE setting for Jesus' final days on earth was Jerusalem, a city located at a site with deep spiritual roots. Two thousand years earlier, long before the city existed, Abraham laid his precious son, Isaac, on an altar here as a sacrifice. But God stopped the Patriarch, providing a ram as a substitute, which he "sacrificed . . . as a burnt offering in place of his son" (Genesis 22:13).

A thousand years later, King David made Jerusalem the capital of Israel and the future site for the temple. For generations, at this place where God provided a ram for Isaac, priests offered substitutionary sacrifices for Abraham's descendants. Now, to this same hilltop, God brought His precious Son during Passover as an offering, not just for the Jews but the whole world.¹

The blood of a million sacrifices called Jesus to Jerusalem to offer Himself as the ultimate sin offering. As the Son of God, He was the perfect sacrifice—divinity and humanity in one person. As the Son of David, Jesus was the rightful king of Zion. As heaven's high priest, He was the ideal mediator. As the model prophet, He was God's voice of truth and sword of judgment.

The first stop on His redemptive mission was the temple, *which had turned into a carnival of corruption!* As king in the line of David, He had the authority to drive out the crooks and reform temple practices. As the Son of God, He had the right. After all, this was His Father's house.



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When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22



PREPARE YOUR HEART

We need not fear the Son's zeal to cleanse His temple . . . nor to purify our lives. When He scrubs away sin, He frees us from guilt and gives us a sense of newness and health. His cleansing invites us to walk with Him in "a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10). Open your heart to Christ's refining touch as you open this study.

Father, thank You for making me "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19). I invite Your Son to do His cleansing work through the power of the Spirit and help me realize the wholeness and life You have in mind for me, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 21:12–22](#) slowly. Don't skip though the verses. Let Matthew be your guide as he reveals the scenes, some harsh and some hopeful. In the space below, write down your initial impressions.



Observation: Clearing Out and Condemning

Observation lays a solid foundation on which we build the next elements of Bible study, which are interpretation, correlation, and application.²



When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22

Clearing Out the Temple—Matthew 21:12–17

What strong verbs did Matthew use to describe Jesus' actions in [Matthew 21:12](#)? What do these words communicate about Jesus' emotions?

Just imagine yourself in the courtyard hearing tables crash and coins skitter across the stone floor. Bleating sheep bolt for shelter. Merchants scoop up their goods and beat a path to the exit. *Such passionate zeal for the purity of God's house (John 2:17)!*

According to [21:13](#), Jesus quoted lines from [Isaiah 56:7](#) and [Jeremiah 7:11](#). What did the Lord want His temple to be? How did the priests and merchants veer from this intent?

How did Jesus restore the temple to its true intention, according to [21:14–15](#)? How is the children's response similar to the blind men's in [9:27](#) and [20:30](#), the Gentile woman's in [15:22](#), and the crowd's at the triumphal entry in [21:9](#)?



When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22

Contrast the Lord's *righteous* indignation with the priests' *unrighteous* indignation in [Matthew 21:15–17](#). How did Jesus point out their sin by quoting [Psalm 8:2](#)?

Condemning an Unfruitful Tree—Matthew 21:18–22

According to [Matthew 21:18–20](#), what did Jesus do the next morning, and how did the disciples respond? How does Jesus' reply in [21:21–22](#) logically relate to the disciples question?

The chief priests behind the corruption in the temple wore robes of religion. They looked religious, but their religious deeds were empty pretense. They were studies in hypocrisy.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: What Do Jesus' Actions Mean?

To understand the meaning of Jesus cleansing the temple, we need to examine the corrupt practices He confronted.



When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22

Reform and Restoration

The setting was the Court of the Gentiles, a large courtyard circling the temple open to all people. As Jesus quoted from Isaiah, the Lord envisioned His temple to be “a house of prayer *for all nations*” (Isaiah 56:7, emphasis added). However, instead of opening their arms to welcome foreigners, the guardians of God’s house were picking these worshipers’ pockets.

Use your resources to find out how the moneychangers and priests extorted temple pilgrims. In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the corrupt practices on page 150. Summarize the dirty dealings.

Jesus’ first task as king was to clean up corruption so people could offer their lambs without getting fleeced themselves! Second was to heal the blind and lame who were excluded from worship, allowing them to offer their sacrifices.³ Jesus’ actions display His *authority* and His *heart*. How is His response to corruption and restoration of the broken instructive for us today?

Seeing Jesus lower the boom on the bad guys, the children echoed the triumphal entry chant, “Praise God for the Son of David” (Matthew 21:15). The King had shown the right use of anger, which wasn’t the raging storm of an impatient man but lightning flashes of God’s holy passion for what’s right and good.



When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22

Fruitlessness and Faith

The proud religious leaders, however, weren't interested in dealing with their sin. So, the next day, Jesus illustrated what lay in store for them and, tragically, the nation. In [Matthew 21:18–20](#), how did the tree symbolize the spiritual condition of Israel's leaders? What did Jesus' action foreshadow? For help, read pages 153–154 in Pastor Chuck's commentary.

Having just witnessed hypocrisy on parade at the temple, Jesus used the cursed fig tree as an illustration of the fruitless, corrosive results of religion disconnected from God. Jesus also used the fig tree as a lesson in faith. Explain Jesus' teaching on faith, in [21:21–22](#), and why it's important for us today?

Some mountain-like situations are impossible for us to fix or change. But Christ can, and He tells us to have faith in Him because He's the mountain-mover. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Praying in Faith

Earlier in Matthew, Jesus taught that if the disciples “had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible” (Matthew 17:20). So, the *size* of our faith isn't the issue but the *object* of our faith.



When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22

Some have concluded from Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew that we can claim any blessing we want if we pray in faith. But is that really true? How did John explain prayer in [1 John 5:14](#) and how does John's explanation correlate with what we've learned from Jesus in Matthew?

In conclusion, we trust God with our impossible situations and always pray according to His will. God tells us what pleases Him in His Word. If we make certain our prayers align with Scripture, we'll always know we're praying for what pleases God.



Application: Learning Some Valuable Lessons

On the first days of Holy Week, Jesus taught many valuable lessons about who He was and how we follow Him. Let's list four of them.

1. From His courage to confront evil, *we learn not to be afraid of feeling angry if it's the right kind of anger.* Avoid passivity in the presence of abuse.
2. From His rebuke of the corrupt priests, *we learn to steer clear of all things hypocritical.* Ask the Lord to cleanse the temple of your heart.
3. From His cursing of the fig tree, *we learn that life is about producing the fruit of the Spirit not growing leaves.* Focus on your inner character.
4. From our understanding of Jesus' teaching on prayer, *we learn to guard against making the extreme our standard.* Focus your prayers on God and His will.



When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22

Which of these principles is the Spirit prompting you to apply? How can you do so?

To the very end, Jesus kept on confronting sin, showing compassion, and teaching. He's a model of perseverance. May the Lord give us the same courage and faithfulness to follow Him into the storms of our lives, trusting Him to go with us.



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, the image of Your Son confronting powerful political and religious people of His day inspires me today. That kind of courage doesn't come naturally. Fill me with His courage as I stand up for Christ's cause in my world. I know You are with me to do the impossible as I step out in faith and in the name of Your Son. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. "Jesus probably entered Jerusalem through the sheep gate. . . . This gate pierced the eastern city wall to the north of the temple enclosure. Worshippers brought sheep into the city through this gate for sacrificing because it was the closest gate to the temple. It was fitting that the Lamb of God should enter Jerusalem through this gate." Thomas Constable, "*Matthew 21:10–11*," *Constable's Notes*, netbible.org.
2. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*" at insight.org.
3. The blind and lame were historically excluded from the temple (2 *Samuel* 5:6–8), but Jesus made it possible for them to worship too.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY THREE

Slugging It Out with Caustic Critics

Matthew 21:23–46

Like honey attracts flies, Jesus attracted critics. As time passed, they became increasingly more caustic, intense, and downright ugly.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PEOPLE often imagine Jesus as He is pictured in medieval paintings—a sad look on His face, His body as thin as a willow branch—sheepish, docile, and passive. But that's not the Jesus of the gospels. Matthew portrayed Jesus strong and determined, fearless in defending God's truth, unbending in pursuing His mission, and unquenchable in His passion for what's right and good.

Jesus had already stood toe-to-toe with religious leaders, rebuking their hypocrisy (Matthew 15:1–14). Instead of repenting, though, they assaulted Jesus with hateful accusations, relentless challenges, and verbal traps. Fearlessly, Jesus fended off each attack with fiery rebukes aimed at melting their hard hearts. Each encounter, however, only angered them even more.

Jesus' cleansing the temple set the stage for the final showdown. With their money-making machine upended, the chief priests surrounded Jesus like a mob of thugs to discredit His authority and disgrace His character. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we begin round one where Jesus blocked every blow and even turned these religious leaders' own tactics against them.



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Slugging It Out with Caustic Critics

Matthew 21:23–46



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps a critic has publicly assaulted you, and you know the humiliation of his or her caustic words. Draw near to Jesus as your courageous defender and pray for insight as you study His words of hope.

Father, when enemies attack me, I feel like the psalmist, “surrounded by terror” (Psalm 31:13). Surely, Jesus felt the same way. Help me learn from Him as my protector in my time of need, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The events in the passage took place on Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus' *final* day to teach and preach the gospel publicly.¹ How quickly time had passed since the Father pronounced Him “my dearly loved Son” at His baptism (Matthew 3:17), launching Jesus' public ministry. Sadly, His public proclamation was met with increasingly intense hostility.

Read [Matthew 21:23–46](#) thoughtfully. Jesus was probably teaching in one of the temple's porticos when some priests and elders demanded His credentials: “By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?” (Matthew 21:23).²



Observation: Question and Response, Parables and Rebuke

When we observe the Scriptures, we identify similar words and concepts that weave through a passage to develop a theme or themes.³ Throughout this passage, look for the theme of *submitting to authority*.

Question and Response—Matthew 21:23–27

What was Jesus doing that prompted certain Sanhedrin members—part of the ruling council of Judaism—to demand that Jesus prove His authority? (Hint: use the context to determine what “all these things” refers to in Matthew 21:23.)



Slugging It Out with Caustic Critics

Matthew 21:23–46

Of course, Jesus' authority came from His Father at His baptism. But instead of saying so, Jesus shifted the focus to John the Baptizer's authority. What did Jesus ask about John ([Matthew 21:24–27](#))? How did Jesus' question hook *them* on the horns of a dilemma?

Since priests and elders refused to answer His question, saying, “We don’t know,” Jesus refused to answer their question . . . at least not directly. Instead, through parables, Jesus turned their question into a rebuke. We’ll examine two of the parables now and the third in the next study.

Parables and Rebuke—Matthew 21:28–41

Looking at the first parable [Matthew 21:28–32](#), describe the attitude and actions of both sons toward their father. Which son submitted to his father's authority?

We'll save Jesus' interpretation for the next phase of our study. For now, let's move on to Jesus' second story about a group of evil tenants. Summarize the story and write down key words that Jesus would've emphasized ([Matthew 21:33–39](#)).



Slugging It Out with Caustic Critics

Matthew 21:23–46

Jesus asked these Sanhedrin “judges” to issue their verdict: “‘When the owner of the vineyard returns,’ Jesus asked, ‘what do you think he will do to those farmers?’” (Matthew 21:40). What did they say in [21:41](#)?

In 21:42–46, Jesus issued *His* verdict on these leaders and the nation. Let’s look deeper into these verses as we interpret the passage.

By the time Jesus’ final week arrived, enough was enough. He decided to be as firm and as aggressive as His opponents, and we admire Him for that. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: What Do Jesus’ Parables Mean?

Jesus had a way of turning the tables on His enemies by pointing out their heart problem—namely, their unwillingness to submit to God’s authority. Jesus’ parable of the two sons illustrates their disobedient nature. Whom did Jesus say the sons represented, according to [Matthew 21:31–32](#)? What insight into the religious leaders’ hearts did Jesus reveal, and how is that revelation instructive for us?



Slugging It Out with Caustic Critics

Matthew 21:23–46

Underneath their righteous robes, the priests and elders were like disobedient children, disrespectful and two-faced. In the parable of the landowner, Jesus warned them of the deadly consequences of their defiance. What is the meaning of Jesus' story in Matthew 21:33–41? What does this story teach us about God, and how is that truth relevant today?

It didn't take long for the priests and elders to catch on that they were the "wicked farmers" plotting to kill Jesus (Matthew 21:45). By their own definition of judgment, they deserved death.

Concluding this section in [21:42–44](#), Jesus shifted His metaphor to a "stone." Why? Remember the *authority* theme. What authority did Jesus indirectly claim by quoting [Psalm 118:22–23](#) and by taking the kingdom of God away from the Jews? For help, read pages 161–162 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*.

By casting Himself as the landowner's son and the rejected stone, Jesus subtly answered the priests' and elders' original question about His authority. He was the Son of God, the Messiah whom the Jews rejected. But there was an unexpected twist: *the rejected stone would become the cornerstone*. God would vindicate His Son, and Jesus would become the cornerstone of God's new building project.

No doubt, giving the vineyard to others is a reference to turning over to the Gentiles the blessings that would have gone to Israel. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Slugging It Out with Caustic Critics

Matthew 21:23–46



Correlation: The Cornerstone of the Church

Years later, Paul picked up the cornerstone metaphor in his letter to the church in Ephesus. Addressing the Gentile believers, Paul explained how God was erecting His new temple. What great truths did Paul share about Christ's church in [Ephesians 2:19–21](#)?

Not long after Paul penned these words, in AD 70, the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. The “stone,” which the religious leaders had stumbled over, crushed them and the nation. But out of the rubble emerged the church, the new dwelling place of God in the heart of every believer.



Application: Lasting Lesson

So, we learn from Jesus' stories that God is *very* patient, but His patience has limits. After years of God sending prophets and even His Son to call His people to repent, judgment eventually came to the nation.

Yet, out of His judgment emerged hope for renewal. The temple may lie in ruins, but God would make a new covenant with His people, indwelling us with the Spirit as living temples and forming us into the church of Christ.

What hope does Christ's strong message to His enemies give you today?



Slugging It Out with Caustic Critics

Matthew 21:23–46

What instruction or inspiration does Christ's example give you for facing a caustic person?

On that Tuesday, Jesus told a third story to rebuke His enemies—a parable about a king who planned a grand wedding feast for his son. Who did the king invite to enjoy the delicious banquet? We'll find out in the next study, but here's a peek at the guest list—you're on it!



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, give me the confidence to stand strong for Christ. Help me to proclaim the truth clearly when Your enemies are spreading lies. Thank You for making me a temple of the Holy Spirit and joining me to Christ's body, the church. I stand in Your grace on that solid rock of truth and secure my life to the Cornerstone of my faith. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. On Wednesday, Jesus remained in Bethany. On Thursday, He returned to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, which led to His arrest in Gethsemane and overnight trials. He was crucified on Friday and resurrected on Sunday.
2. Jesus taught under the covered colonnades that encircled the Court of the Gentiles. The largest was the Royal Porch, so-called because it was nearest the ancient site of Solomon's palace—a fitting place for the Son of David to teach. It consisted "of four rows of columns, 162 in all, forming three vast halls, on the south side of the temple complex." William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 776. A picture of a model of the temple with the Royal Porch on the south side is on page 150 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*.
3. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY FOUR

A Dialogue with Deceivers

Matthew 22:1–22

Those who stood against Jesus were master deceivers. They didn't announce their motives. They just conspired to find a way to get Him on that cross.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It's impossible to overstate the sheer courage of Jesus. Despite the price on His head, He entered Jerusalem in full view of those seeking to kill Him. Any other hunted man would hide from his pursuers, but not Jesus. He ministered in the open at the temple while His enemies lurked in the shadows.

When His enemies attacked, they used deception and trickery, concealing their evil motives in the folds of their religious robes. Their goal was to inflict deadly harm on Jesus while they kept their hands clean. Jesus, however, knew exactly what they were up to. Not once did He try to avoid His enemies or back down when cornered. He faced them with the calm of a person who was in complete control of His circumstances and in charge at all times.

In fact, Jesus even went on the offensive as we'll see in this *Searching the Scriptures* study that examines the third of three parables indicting the leading priests and elders. Let's explore how Jesus combated these deceivers and discover truths to counter deception in our own lives.



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A Dialogue with Deceivers

Matthew 22:1–22



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Each devious attack on Jesus underscored the fact that Jesus' enemies were merely pawns of the greatest deceiver, the devil. As followers of Jesus, we must be aware of the spiritual battles around us and rely on our Lord's power. Take time right now to still your heart. Reflect on what the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:10–13. Ask Jesus to equip you through this study.

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The priests and elders had come to Jesus demanding, "By what authority are you doing these things?" (Matthew 21:23). The real issue, though, wasn't Jesus' authority but their resistance to authority.

Israel's leaders *disobeyed* God like the son in Jesus' first parable who said he would obey his father but then didn't (21:28–32). They *defied* God by silencing His prophets and plotting to kill His Son, just like the greedy tenant farmers in Jesus' second parable who killed the landowner's servants and his son (21:33–46).

Now, in His third parable, Jesus illustrates the religious leaders' *disregard* of God in a story about a great king and his son.



Observation: A Revealing Parable and a Deceptive Plan

We begin *Searching the Scriptures* by observing the text, noting contrasts and comparisons, descriptions and action words, and, particularly in Jesus' parables, unexpected twists.¹



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW
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STUDY FOUR

A Dialogue with Deceivers

Matthew 22:1–22

A Story That Revealed the Truth—Matthew 22:1–14

Read [Matthew 22:1–3](#) and write down what would have surprised Jesus' listeners.

What did the king do next according to [22:4–8](#)? How might Jesus' listeners have reacted to the attitude of the invited guests? What did the king say about those he had invited?

How did the king fill his banquet hall according to 22:9–14. Other than accepting the invitation, what requirement did the king expect from his guests?



A Dialogue with Deceivers

Matthew 22:1–22

A Deceptive Plan That Failed to Entrap—Matthew 22:15–22

The Pharisees seem to step right out of Jesus' parable into the episode that Matthew described in [Matthew 22:15–18](#). These conniving religious leaders perfectly illustrate the wicked guests who killed the king's messengers. How did they plan to catch Jesus with His own words? Describe the substance as well as the emotion of Jesus' immediate response to their question?

How did Jesus answer their question without falling into their trap, according to [22:19–22](#)?

Here's a perfect example of Jesus being "wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove." His answer was disarming. They just walked away. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A Dialogue with Deceivers

Matthew 22:1–22



Interpretation: Worthy and Unworthy, Seeing through Deception

Throughout His ministry, Jesus preached a simple message: “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17). He was inviting the Jews to enter a state of blessing under God’s rule by believing in Him and becoming His followers.

What represented the kingdom of heaven in Jesus’ parable, based on [22:1–2](#)?² What features of this grand event make it similar to God’s kingdom?

How had God been calling Israel’s religious leaders into His kingdom, and why did they ignore His invitations, according to [22:3–6](#)?

The religious leaders proved themselves unworthy, even to the point of murder, by rejecting God’s invitations. How do you interpret the analogy of the king opening the banquet to all people, “good and bad alike” (22:10)? Consult page 167 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*.



A Dialogue with Deceivers

Matthew 22:1–22

How are we to interpret the king's response to the improperly dressed guest? The new guests came as they were (Matthew 22:10), so we can assume that the king would have graciously provided each guest a suitable banquet robe. This guest, apparently, rejected the gift, which surprised the king. “How is it you are here without wedding clothes?” (22:12). The man's silence revealed his pride. He considered his old garments good enough.

Use your resources to explain what this part of the parable means—the need for proper clothing, the severe judgment, and Jesus' conclusion, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (22:14). For help, read pages 167–168 of *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, and for an online resource, consult *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

In 22:15–22, the Pharisees and their Herodian coconspirators model the treachery of the original guests in Jesus' parable. Jesus perceived their evil intent and rebuked them, “You hypocrites!” (22:18). Why is hypocrisy such a serious and deadly sin—practically and spiritually?

Their question concealed a trap. If Jesus had said one must pay the tax, the Jewish nationalists led by the Pharisees would have turned against Jesus as a traitor. If Jesus had said one must not pay the tax, the Herodians (loyalists to Rome) would have had Him arrested. Traitor or insurgent—there seemed no alternative!



A Dialogue with Deceivers

Matthew 22:1–22

How did Jesus' answer resolve the dilemma? What does He mean, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God" in Matthew 22:21, and why is this statement so significant for Jesus-followers today?

When you catch a hypocrite in deception, he or she will never admit the truth in return, saying, "You're right. I'm guilty." The person just walks away. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Invitation to the World

Jesus already told the religious leaders that God would take away the kingdom of heaven from them and give it "to a nation that will produce the proper fruit" (Matthew 21:43). In this parable Jesus explained how: by going "out to the street corners" and calling everyone, including Gentiles, to come to His kingdom banquet (22:9).

In Luke's parallel passage, Jesus expands the range of the call. Whom did the master tell the servants to invite, and where did he tell them to go according to [Luke 14:21–23](#)?

Like the master who opened wide His banquet hall to anyone who would come, God "wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Because the Jews rejected Christ, "God offered salvation to the rest of the world" (Romans 11:15).



A Dialogue with Deceivers

Matthew 22:1–22

What is our part in delivering God's generous invitation according to [Matthew 28:18–20](#) and [Acts 1:8](#)?

*We make the offer of salvation available to our friends, the people at work, at school.
We tell them, "Whosoever may come, but you must come through Christ to the cross."
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Application: What Do We Learn?

History is filled with tragic accounts of dictators and tyrants deceiving people.

But from Jesus, we learn that *God is the true sovereign*. He is the gracious king who offers a banquet of spiritual blessings. We learn that *God is just*. He has the right to determine how we enter His kingdom—by the singular way of His Son. Finally, *God is God*. To Him we must give our highest allegiance and humblest obedience. We can render to "Caesar" what is his; but God alone is our king, and we give Him our all.

What lessons did you learn from Jesus' dealings with deceivers in this passage?



A Dialogue with Deceivers

Matthew 22:1–22

Express your own gratitude and praise to the King who invited you to the wedding feast of His Son.

There's only one way to enter His banquet hall: we must wear the righteous robe of Jesus that covers our tattered rags. Praise God for His grace, which not only invites us but makes us fit for eternity, **secure in the righteousness of Christ!**



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, thank You for rescuing me from a state of separation and calling me near to Your side through Jesus Christ. You have prepared the banquet—what generosity! You have issued the invitations—what love! You have dressed me for eternity—what grace! My allegiance is to You alone as my sovereign King and loving Master. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](http://insight.org)" at insight.org.
2. A banquet open to all people is a beautiful illustration of God's grace and a common metaphor for God's kingdom in Scripture: *Isaiah 25:6–8; 55:1–2; Revelation 19:9.*



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY FIVE

Will We Be Married in Heaven?

Matthew 22:23–33

The Lord doesn't wonder what He will do with us when we're no longer on this earth. He has a perfect plan.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SPOUSES sometimes wonder, “Will we be married in heaven?” When one spouse nears death, the question pulls on their heartstrings with an urgent tug. As husband and wife hold hands in their final moments together, neither can imagine not being married in heaven. How can they live an eternity as “two” after living a lifetime as one?

The question of marriage in heaven is only one on a long list of questions we have about the afterlife. How will we recognize each other in heaven? Will we have wings like angels? What will we do? What will we look like? What happens to our bodies after they decay?

In our culture, fanciful notions mix with superstitions to form a thick fog of misinformation about the afterlife. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, Jesus shines His truth through the haze of false ideas to clarify our view of what happens after we die.



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Will We Be Married in Heaven?

Matthew 22:23–33



PREPARE YOUR HEART

In the space below, write down a question you may have about heaven, and offer this question to the Lord while you take a moment to pray before you seek answers in His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

During His long day of teaching at the temple, Jesus fended off several verbal attacks.

A delegation of priests and elders approached Jesus first, demanding proof of His authority (Matthew 21:23). A group of flattering Pharisees lobbed a loaded question about paying taxes to Caesar (22:15–17).

Then, in this study's passage, [Matthew 22:22–33](#), some Sadducees tried to tangle Jesus in a web of theological controversy about the afterlife.



Observation: Critics' Question, Jesus' Answer, Crowd's Response

We begin *Searching the Scriptures* by observing the text, noting the *where*, *when*, *who*, *what*, and *why* of the dialogue.¹ The “where” was the temple, likely one of the covered porticos where rabbis often taught. The “when” was Tuesday of Holy Week. The “who” were the Sadducees, Jesus, and the watching crowd. “Why” did the Sadducees approach Jesus? Let's find out.



Will We Be Married in Heaven?

Matthew 22:23–33

The Sadducees and Their Question—Matthew 22:23–28

Observe the Sadducees' question in [Matthew 22:23–28](#). What do you think they insinuated with their lengthy introduction?

Between the lines of the Sadducees' elaborate question are their theological beliefs, which we'll explore in more detail in the interpretation section. For now, let's look at Jesus' masterful response.

Jesus' Rebuke and Answer—Matthew 22:29–32

What two points did Jesus make in His initial rebuke in [Matthew 22:29](#)? How do these points about the Word and God complement one another?

What three assertions did Jesus make in [Matthew 22:30](#)?



Will We Be Married in Heaven?

Matthew 22:23–33

In [Matthew 22:31–32](#), Jesus moved from the specific question to address the larger issue. In the space below, summarize Jesus' argument in favor of the resurrection of the dead. Find the Old Testament verse Jesus quoted by looking in the footnotes or margin of your Bible.

The Sadducees' problem was they didn't know the Word of God, and they didn't know the God of the Word. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Crowd's Astonishment—Matthew 22:33

Matthew frequently recorded the crowd's response. How did the crowd react in [Matthew 22:33](#)? Compare with previous responses in [7:28](#), [9:33](#), [12:23](#), and [15:31](#). What point did Matthew make throughout his gospel by highlighting Jesus' appeal to the masses?

The people cheered when Jesus turned the tables on the corrupt religious elite. Now we'll explore how Jesus' teaching corrected the Sadducees' misbeliefs and gave His followers hope about our future in heaven.



Will We Be Married in Heaven?

Matthew 22:23–33



Interpretation: Understanding the Resurrection of the Dead

According to Matthew, the Sadducees believed that “there is no resurrection from the dead” (Matthew 22:23). In their view, “the soul perished with the body and . . . the concept of the resurrection was a myth.”² So why did they ask Jesus about the resurrection if they didn’t believe it?

Jesus replied confidently, “*when* the dead rise”—not *if* (22:30, emphasis added). Our existence does not end at death as the Sadducees believed back then and many people still believe today. The resurrection assures us that we will reunite after death with those who’ve died in the Lord, and Christ-followers will live with Christ for eternity. ***What hope!***

Jesus also stated that the dead “will neither marry nor be given in marriage,” and He clarified, “In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven” (22:30).³

What did Jesus mean and *not* mean? How will we be *like* angels? How does marriage on earth prepare us for our relationships in heaven—with Jesus and with others? For help with your interpretation, read Pastor Chuck’s *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, page 177. For an online resource, consult [Constable’s Notes](http://netbible.org) at netbible.org.



Will We Be Married in Heaven?

Matthew 22:23–33

Does your interpretation of this passage help answer your question about the afterlife that you wrote down at the beginning of this study? If so, how?

Did Jesus mean to say that we won't be close to our husband or wife in heaven? He didn't say that. No, we'll become even closer in heaven. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Resurrection as Foundational Truth

The apostle Paul filled in some of the details about our resurrection in [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#). What is the basis of our resurrection hope? When will the resurrection happen? What encouragement does this truth give you personally?

What about the souls of believers who die before Christ appears? Paul answered the question in [Philippians 1:20–24](#) when he was considering his own death. What did he say would happen when he died, according to verse 23?



Will We Be Married in Heaven?

Matthew 22:23–33

Like seeds planted in soil, our mortal bodies go into the grave when we die. But our souls immediately go to heaven to be with Christ. “To be absent from the body,” Paul assured us, is “to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8 NASB). How does Paul describe our bodies when Christ resurrects them and reunites them with our souls, according to [2 Corinthians 15:42–44, 51–53](#)?

The Sadducees denied the resurrection because they falsely assumed life in heaven would be like life on earth. However, Jesus taught that we cannot view eternity through the lens of our earthly experience. Just because people marry on earth doesn’t mean they will marry in heaven. The Sadducees’ premise was wrong, so their question was irrelevant.

Exactly what will heaven be like? While a veil of mystery obscures the details, we do know that freedom from death in our resurrected bodies means freedom from pain, darkness, despair, and disease. It also means we will experience perfect relationships without sin’s inevitable conflicts. The bonds with those we love on earth will be even closer and stronger in heaven.

When death comes near, we can get caught up in a lot of fear. The Lord gave us a little hint of what life in heaven will be like when He said, “We will be as the angels.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Jesus Speaks to Us Today

As we linger over the many truths from this passage, let’s focus on two that we can apply today. First, let’s avoid the mistake of the Sadducees who did not “know the Scriptures” (Matthew 22:29). Through these *Searching the Scriptures* studies, you’re studying God’s Word in ways you may not have studied before. Try adding to your knowledge by memorizing passages that are meaningful to you and then meditate on these words of truth throughout your day.



Will We Be Married in Heaven?

Matthew 22:23–33

What verses or passage from Matthew would you like to memorize? Write the verse in the space below.

Next, let's avoid the second mistake of the Sadducees who did not “know the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). Fear will pull up the seedlings of faith if we don't sink roots into a deep appreciation of the power of God.

God can raise the dead!

If He can do that remarkable feat, what other demonstration of power can you ask Him to display in your life and relationships?



A FINAL PRAYER

Knowing God's Word and His power can help you avoid many pitfalls in your journey of faith. Use the following space to write a closing prayer to God who revealed a glorious future for us with Him in heaven. Indeed, He has the power to accomplish all that He promised. Express your reliance on His Word and your faith in His power to help you with a specific situation you're facing today.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW
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STUDY FIVE

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Will We Be Married in Heaven?

Matthew 22:23–33

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 174.
3. The Sadducees also did not believe in angels or spirits. By comparing the resurrected dead to angels in the afterlife, Jesus refuted this misbelief of the Sadducees as well.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY SIX

The Two Ultimate Questions

Matthew 22:34–46

In this passage, Jesus begins by giving an answer that the lawyer could not question and ends with a question the lawyer could not answer.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

BEING the wisest of all teachers, Jesus pointed His questions to the hearts of His hearers. He wanted people to think deeply, search their souls, and, eventually, arrive at life-transforming decisions. His questions were like guides leading His listeners to the gates of the kingdom of God where all they must do to enter was take a single step of faith in Him.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study's passage, Jesus first masterfully answered the question of a legal expert who was testing Him on a matter of Mosaic law. But then, He turned the tables and asked His own questions.

A preacher in the early church, John Chrysostom, recognized the magnitude of what Jesus was asking: “[Jesus] asks these questions, secretly leading them on to confess Him also to be God.”¹ Jesus’ questions at that time do the same work of urging us to make the same confession of faith in our own time. Let’s look closer at His questions and their transformative power in the lives of all who sincerely and seriously consider them.



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The Two Ultimate Questions

Matthew 22:34–46



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, open your heart in prayer.

Father, I receive Jesus' questions as gifts of grace. Use them to pierce the armor of my doubts and release my faith in Your Son as my Savior and Lord, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The dialogue in [Matthew 22:34–46](#) represents the religious leaders' final attempt to expose Jesus as a false messiah. With the Sadducees in retreat after their failed attack on Jesus in 22:23–40, the Pharisees mounted one last offensive—this time staking their hopes on an “expert in religious law” and his cleverly devised question (Matthew 22:35).



Observation: The Greatest Commandment and the Divine Son

Observation is the first step in Bible study because it lays the groundwork for the steps that follow: interpretation, correlation, and application.² Observe the passage by mulling over each word and phrase in the text while you answer the following questions. Look for thematic and logical connections you haven't seen before.

Why did the Pharisees want to attack Jesus again, and what did the “expert” ask Jesus in [Matthew 22:34–36](#)?

The questioner was a *nomikos*, a “man of the law” who was “extremely knowledgeable” in the Hebrew Scriptures and “would be called upon to explain and apply the Law.”³ Asking Jesus to pick the greatest commandment in the Torah was like shoving Him into an ongoing intellectual street fight. Rabbinic schools fought each on questions like these to establish dominance.



The Two Ultimate Questions

Matthew 22:34–46

Until Jesus, no rabbi had prevailed over the others in this legalese scrap. What did Jesus say, according to [Matthew 22:37–40](#), and what aspects made His answer so exceptional? For background, read the verses that Jesus quoted in their context: [Deuteronomy 6:4–9](#) and [Leviticus 19:11–19](#).

Now it was Jesus' turn to test the Pharisees. With what “simple” question did Jesus begin, according to [Matthew 22:41–42](#), and how did the Pharisees answer? By asking this question, Jesus was opening the door to what vitally important subject?

Then Jesus quoted a verse from the messianic Psalm 110 and presented a kind of riddle to the Pharisees. What were His questions in [Matthew 22:43–46](#)? Try to put the riddle in your own words?

Jesus had “silenced the Sadducees.” (The Greek word for *silenced* means “muzzled,” Matthew 22:34.) Now He shut the mouths of these lions and put an end to all future verbal stalking. “No one could answer him. And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions” (22:46).



The Two Ultimate Questions

Matthew 22:34–46



Interpretation: The Meaning of “My Lord”

The Hebrew Scriptures promised that God would raise up a descendent of David to sit on an everlasting throne and bring peace to the world (2 Samuel 7:12; Isaiah 9:6–7). David’s divinely inspired homage to his future son as “my Lord” in Psalm 110:1 formed the basis of Jesus’ question, “Since David called the Messiah ‘my Lord,’ how can the Messiah be his son?” (Matthew 22:45).⁴

What truth about the identity of the Messiah did Jesus try to teach the Pharisees? For help, read page 185 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Insights on Matthew 16–28*. For an online resource, consult *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org.

At Jesus’ triumphal entry, the people acclaimed Jesus as “the Son of David!” (21:9). Children in the temple sang the same tune (21:15). The Pharisees must have been deaf not to hear these shouts and songs. So Jesus then invited the Pharisees to join their voices to the chorus and take the next steps. *Believe in the Son of David as the Son of God and give homage to Him as your Lord.*

Why couldn’t the Pharisees answer Jesus’ question in 22:45?

The Pharisees couldn’t answer because they wouldn’t allow the truth to sink in. They would rather follow the dictates of their carnal lives than surrender their souls to the only One who could transform them from darkness to light. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Two Ultimate Questions

Matthew 22:34–46



Correlation: The Lawyer's Open Heart

Mark's account recorded the legal expert's response to Jesus that Matthew omitted. Read [Mark 12:28–34](#). How did the teacher of religious law respond to Jesus, and what important truth did the man add that revealed His understanding according to [12:32–33](#)?

Mark followed up with Jesus' response: "Realizing how much the man understood, Jesus said to him, 'You are not far from the Kingdom of God'" (Mark 12:34). What quality do you think Jesus perceived in this man's heart? What next step should this man have taken to enter the kingdom of God?

The other Pharisees locked their hearts behind iron bars of pride and hypocrisy. This expert in the law, however, demonstrated genuine devotion to God and compassion for others. He understood what Christ had taught earlier to "show mercy, not offer sacrifices" (Matthew 9:13), and, perhaps, he went on to take that final step and believe in Jesus. Does this man's example give you hope for unbelievers in your life who may also be "not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34)? If so, how?



The Two Ultimate Questions

Matthew 22:34–46

Jesus said to love God and love others. I think of the cross. The vertical post represents loving God and the horizontal beam, loving others. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Loving God, Loving Others

As Jesus taught, the greatest command is to love God, and the second command, being equally as great, is to love others. On these two pegs, all the commands and prophecies of Scripture hang. And on the bedrock of these principles, we build our lives.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains how loving God and loving others go hand-in-hand:

The Bible's message is . . . to turn your attention toward the only One who is worthy of ultimate love and adoration and worship. And once that . . . begins to take shape, it's amazing what it does to our relationship with others. We find it easier to love others when we love God.⁵

In what ways have you found Pastor Chuck's statement to be true in your life?

How can you put into practice the principles of loving God and others this week? Try to come up with realistic ideas. What might "loving God" look like on your commute to work or during your daily chores? What might "loving others" look like in normal conversations and casual interactions?



The Two Ultimate Questions

Matthew 22:34–46

Now put these ideas into action! Before closing this study, though, take a few worshipful moments to echo David's prophetic praise of Jesus as "my Lord." Declare it aloud in prayer. Give thanks that Jesus has ushered you through the gates of His kingdom and you now live securely in His loving care.



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, when I call Your Son "my Lord," I give Him first place in my heart. As He once ascended to Your right hand in heaven, He has ascended to the pinnacle of my dearest affections. As He sits on the throne of heaven, He sits on the throne of my heart. He is over all creation and all that's good, and I give Him my all for now and always. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. As quoted by Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 184.
2. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).
3. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, 182.
4. "The New Testament contains more references to this psalm than to any other chapter in the Old Testament." Thomas Constable, "Psalm 110" introduction, *Constable's Notes*, [netbible.org](https://www.netbible.org).
5. Taken from Charles R. Swindoll, transcript of the sermon, "The Two Ultimate Questions."



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY SEVEN

Exposing Religious Phonies

Matthew 23:1–12

*The Pharisees Jesus condemned looked so religious and sounded so righteous.
They came across like pious saints, but they were deceivers.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

Ahurricane is coming! A weather forecaster warns people in the path of a storm to prepare now to avoid disaster. Warnings can save lives, but if ignored, they are just words in the wind.

In Matthew 23–25, Jesus warned people about the proud religious elite and the coming judgment because of those leaders' failures. Dark clouds of war with Rome loomed on the horizon, and the temple would be reduced to rubble in AD 70. But this disaster was merely a harbinger of more severe judgments. Jesus forecasted even greater storms in the distant future—God's judgments at the end of the age.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll witness the first wave of Jesus' warnings as He exposes the spiritual phonies in leadership to be nothing more than hypocritical deceivers. Sadly, not many of Jesus' listeners heeded His warnings about false leaders and the damage they cause . . . but we can take heed today.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Lord is our surest shelter in any storm. As you open His Word, draw near to Him. Use the psalmist's words to inspire your prayer.

*From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. . . .
Let me dwell in Your tent forever;
Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. (Psalm 61:2, 4 NASB)*



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Exposing Religious Phonies

Matthew 23:1–12



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Understandably, Jesus' tone was urgent. Time was ticking away His final opportunities to issue lifesaving warnings, and He measured every word with care. Read [Matthew 23:1–12](#) and pay special attention to whom Jesus addressed. Then we'll look closer at Jesus' words to each group.



Observation: How to Spot a Phony

Using our skills of observation, we can see patterns in the passage that reveal Jesus' flow of thought.¹ Observing the context is crucial. Jesus had just confronted the Pharisees with questions they refused to answer about His messiahship (Matthew 22:41–46). With the Pharisees in silent retreat, Jesus took this ripe moment to warn the crowd and His disciples.

What did Jesus say was the role of the scribes and Pharisees, according to [23:1–2](#)?

According to [23:3](#), what did Jesus tell the people to do and *not* to do?



Exposing Religious Phonies

Matthew 23:1–12

In [Matthew 23:3–5](#), Jesus listed three reasons not to follow the Pharisees. In [23:5–7](#), He offered three examples of their spiritual pride. List the reasons and the examples in the space below.

Reasons Not to Follow	Examples of Spiritual Pride

Turning to His disciples, Jesus issued three commands in the form of “don’ts,” according to [23:8–10](#). List the “don’ts” and the reason that Jesus gives for each one.

Jesus’ “Don’ts”	Jesus’ Reasoning

In [23:11–12](#), Jesus concludes with a positive command in the form of a statement, “you must be,” followed by a principle. Write down what you observe in these verses.



Exposing Religious Phonies

Matthew 23:1–12

*If we teach one thing and live another way, we're hypocrites. We're phonies. We speak well but we don't live well. Because the Pharisees did that, Jesus said, "Don't follow them."
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Interpretation: Spiritual Leaders Not to Follow

When we hear God's Word, regardless of who is teaching it, we should "practice and obey" what God says (Matthew 23:3). However, not all Bible teachers live what they preach, and Jesus told His followers to do what they say *not* what they do. Why not? Because they lack character.

Identify the character qualities Jesus said the Pharisees lacked.²

"They don't practice what they teach" (23:3).

Lack of: _____

"They crush people with unbearable religious demands" (23:4).

Lack of: _____

"Everything they do is for show" (23:5).

Lack of: _____

One way the hypocritical Pharisees paraded their piety was to "broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels" (23:5 NASB). *What does that mean?* Read page 192 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28* and write down what phylacteries and tassels are and how the Pharisees turned these symbols of faith into signs of pride.



Exposing Religious Phonies

Matthew 23:1–12

Reflect on what Jesus taught in 23:1–7 and write down a principle or two about how to spot religious phonies and what to do when you see them in leadership.

The Pharisees had no shame. Their religion was an outrageous display of over-the-top ostentation. Everything they did called attention to themselves. How they loved the limelight! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Spiritual Leaders Worth Following

After exposing the self-glorifying behavior of the Pharisees, Jesus instructed His disciples to shun titles that convey superiority, reminding His followers, “All of you are equal as brothers and sisters” (Matthew 23:8). He also affirmed that true leaders promote Christ as teacher, not themselves; and instead of seeking the limelight, they point people to God as the preeminent One.

Jesus concluded, “The greatest among you must be a servant” (23:11), which echoed His previous teaching. “Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave” (20:26–27).

How did Peter apply Christ's principles on leadership to the role of elders in the early church, according to [1 Peter 5:1–3](#)? What practical ways did Peter say leaders should serve?



Exposing Religious Phonies

Matthew 23:1–12

In a nutshell, servant leaders follow Jesus' example of humble love—setting aside self-interest for the sake of others. So can we, if we heed Jesus' warning to not follow the Pharisees!

Cultivate a servant's heart. That's the path to greatness. All of us would do well to improve our serve and look for ways to help others get ahead. The Message reads, "Do you want to stand out? Then step down" (Matthew 23:11 MSG). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: A Map to Servant Leadership

In his book, *Dangerous Calling*, Paul David Tripp details what happens when we ignore Jesus' warning. Here is an abbreviated list of the consequences of pharisaical self-glory:

1. Self-glory will cause you to parade in public what should be kept in private.
2. Self-glory will cause you to be way too self-referencing.
3. Self-glory will cause you to talk when you should be quiet.
4. Self-glory will cause you to care too much about what people think of you.
5. Self-glory will cause you to resist admitting your sins, weaknesses, and failures.
6. Self-glory will cause you to struggle with the blessings of others.³

Do any of these characteristics hit home with you? If so, which one? Is this a recent tendency or an ongoing one?



Exposing Religious Phonies

Matthew 23:1–12

In contrast is Christ's way of humility. How can you pursue the better path of humility and avoid the deceptive tendency toward self-glory?

Paul followed Christ's map of humility well, and he offered a surefire way to avoid the pitfalls of self-glory: "May I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). Memorize Paul's motto and repeat it to yourself often today to avoid the pitfall of hypocrisy and stay on Christ's humble path.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to focus on the cross. Center my thoughts on Christ who bore my sin and gave me all the blessings I possess—my secure standing with You, my direct line to Your throne, and guaranteed inheritance in heaven. My hope, my peace, my life I owe to Christ because of His death on the cross and resurrection. Help me to follow His downward path of humility as I ascend His upward path of serving others. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).
2. In his message, Pastor Chuck Swindoll identified the character qualities the Pharisees lacked as integrity, sympathy, and humility.
3. Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 174–80.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY EIGHT

Seven Woes and a Wail

Matthew 23:13–39

The scribes and Pharisees were in authority, but their voices had a hollow ring because they were eaten up with hypocrisy. But who could tell those in authority the truth? Only one person, Jesus.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SINCE few people in Jesus' day had access to the Scriptures, they depended on their spiritual shepherds to lead them in God's way. Scholarly scribes specialized in Bible interpretation and teaching, and the Pharisees focused on religious practice. Together, they had more influence on the spiritual life of the nation than any other leaders.

However, the scribes and Pharisees were more interested in wielding their power and promoting themselves than tending the sheep. They were just as arrogant and abusive as the spiritual shepherds in the Old Testament whom God told Ezekiel to denounce:

"Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? . . . Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.'" (Ezekiel 34:2, 4 NASB)

Jesus echoed Ezekiel's rebuke with seven "woes" upon the wicked shepherds of His day. These pronouncements represented the most severe judgments Jesus ever uttered. What deeds unleashed His righteous fury? In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll examine their wrongdoings, as well as the tragic consequences of their corrupt leadership—a shepherding malpractice that moved Jesus to tears.



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Seven Woes and a Wail

Matthew 23:13–39



PREPARE YOUR HEART

In contrast, our Good Shepherd seeks us when we stray, tenderly binds our wounded hearts, and restores us with truth and love. As you begin your study, invite Him to lead you through His Word, using the following prayer as a prompt.

Father, as I read the sinful traits of the scribes and Pharisees, remind me that Jesus is the opposite. He is trustworthy and true, righteous and good. Help me, through Your Word, to follow His example and model His character as I apply His words. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 23:13–36](#) in the New American Standard Bible, noting the repetition of the words, “woe” and “hypocrites.”¹ We’ll define these terms in the interpretation section of our study to shed light on Jesus’ meaning. For now, let’s examine the content of His pronouncements.



Observation: Woes upon the Leaders, Wail for the Nation

Using your imagination to enter a biblical scene is an effective technique for *Searching the Scriptures*.² Picture the scribes and Pharisees as grim-faced judges dressed in black garments which drape down the length of their bodies. Opposite them is the lone figure of Jesus who stands erect and confident. His eyes piercing into their dark souls. With unyielding power, He issues His statements as if tolling a death knell, slowly, somberly, and decisively.



Seven Woes and a Wail

Matthew 23:13–39

Declaring Righteous Anger—Matthew 23:13–36

As you read each section, you'll notice a pronouncement ("Woe"), an indictment ("Hypocrites!"), and then examples of wrongdoing. Use the following chart to record in your own words what you observe in each section of woes in Matthew 23:13–33.

Woes	Observations
23:13	
23:15	
23:16–22	
23:23–24	
23:25–26	
23:27–28	
23:29–33	



Seven Woes and a Wail

Matthew 23:13–39

What does “therefore” indicate (Matthew 23:34)? What consequences did Jesus issue, according to 23:34–36?

Jesus’ prophecy, “judgment will fall on this very generation” (23:36), was fulfilled in AD 70 when Jerusalem fell to the Romans and the temple was destroyed. Like Jeremiah weeping over Jerusalem in ruins, Jesus lamented the coming judgment that could have been avoided had the people embraced Him as their Messiah.

Lamenting Rejected Love—Matthew 23:37–39

What heart-wrenching figures of speech did Jesus use to describe His sorrow, according to [Matthew 23:37–39](#)?

Jesus issued judgment on the nation because the people rejected Him, but never think that God delights in judging. The tears of Jesus poured out of the heart of God whose heart was broken over the rejection by His people.

Jesus said to His people, “I had so much to offer you, but you fought against Me. I could have set you free, but you would have nothing to do with Me.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Seven Woes and a Wail

Matthew 23:13–39



Interpretation: Why Jesus Pronounced “Woe”

Deep emotion flowed through each woe Jesus pronounced. The Greek word for “woe,” *ouai*, is a cry of anguish that blends condemnation with compassion. One commentator describes Jesus’ meaning this way:

[*Ouai*] includes not only *wrath*, but also *sorrow*. There is righteous anger here, but it is the anger of the heart of love, broken by the stubborn blindness of men. There is not only an air of savage denunciation; there is also an atmosphere of poignant tragedy.³

What does the meaning of “woe” reveal about Jesus’ nature?

Permeating Jesus’ rebuke was the theme of hypocrisy. Consult pages 194 and 196 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, and write down your definition of *hypocrisy* and the reason Jesus so vehemently condemned it.



Seven Woes and a Wail

Matthew 23:13–39

Review each statement of woe and write down a specific charge for each wrongdoing Jesus listed. For example, we can summarize the first woe in Matthew 23:13 with the charge, *exclusion*. As a result of their hypocrisy, the scribes and Pharisees excluded the people from entering the kingdom of heaven. For Pastor Chuck Swindoll's complete list of charges, consult page 197 of his commentary.

First woe (23:13): Exclusion

Second woe (23:15): _____

Third woe (23:16–22): _____

Fourth woe (23:23–24): _____

Fifth woe (23:25–26): _____

Sixth woe (23:27–28): _____

Seventh woe (23:29–36): _____

What do you learn from Jesus' woes about the damage caused by the hypocrisy of spiritual leaders?

The scribes' and Pharisees' outward religious observances were empty. They were living a lie. Deep within them was bitterness, envy, hatred, pride, arrogance, and even murder.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Seven Woes and a Wail

Matthew 23:13–39



Correlation: Woes versus “Blesseds”

Jesus’ woes in His final public address at the temple form a striking antithesis to His Beatitudes in His first major public address, the Sermon on the Mount. The woes expose the showy piety of the scribes and Pharisees while the true righteousness of those who live in God’s kingdom shines through the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–11).

Take a moment to review the *Beatitudes* and then contrast Jesus’ “blesseds” with His woes below.

How can we avoid the downdraft of religious hypocrisy and soar on the currents of kingdom living? Let’s explore a few ways as we apply our passage.



Application: What Is This Saying to Us?

The Lord condemned hypocrisy because of its destructive influence. A lifestyle of religious performance masks our real selves and gives sin cover to grow. Under our shiny exterior, anger, bitterness, envy, or pride can foment and churn. So, we all need someone to caringly pull down our religious mask and shed light on our secret struggles. Openness to another person and honesty are the surest antidotes to hypocrisy.

In his message, Pastor Chuck Swindoll wisely advises,

When you walk with Christ, you open yourself to His accountability. When you’re willing to be mentored by someone, you are saying, “Probe my life. Point out areas that I need to acknowledge because I want to be pure and clean.”



Seven Woes and a Wail

Matthew 23:13–39

Is there someone to whom you can open your life, perhaps a mentor, friend, or Christian counselor? Who might this person be, and what can you do soon to have a deep-level conversation?

Use the space below to invite your Good Shepherd to reveal any hidden issues that need attention and to lead you to the green pastures of freedom from sin.

Although difficult to hear, the Lord's rebukes are lifelines of hope, invitations to heal and change. Hear the compassion in His words and steer clear of hypocrisy's shadows.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, just as Jesus longed to gather His people under His wings, You long to pull me close to experience Your love and protection. Forgive me for going my own way and resisting Your call. I confess my hypocrisy, the ways I've hidden behind religious masks and not allowed others to truly know me. Help me feel safe enough to open myself to others and, in turn, make them feel safe to open up to me. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Matthew 23:14 appears in brackets in the New American Standard Bible, indicating that it is not included in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts of Matthew. Later copyists may have borrowed this verse from Mark 12:40 and inserted it into Jesus' series of woes because of its similarity.
2. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).
3. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 288, author's emphasis.



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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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



First Glimpses of the Last Days

Matthew 24:1–14

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	



First Glimpses of the Last Days

Matthew 24:1–14

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



First Glimpses of the Last Days

Matthew 24:1–14

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



First Glimpses of the Last Days

Matthew 24:1–14



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



First Glimpses of the Last Days

Matthew 24:1–14



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.



First Glimpses of the Last Days

Matthew 24:1–14



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 Galilaean 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.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY TEN

More Misery Than We Can Imagine

Matthew 24:15–28

Despite our treacherous times, we can wake up tomorrow morning filled with hope. If we are not, we need time in God's Word. God's Word never leaves us with fear or discouragement but always with hope.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As we learned in our previous *Searching the Scriptures* study on Matthew 24:1–14, six signs signal the end of the age and the return of Christ:

- False messiahs “will deceive many” (Matthew 24:5)
- “Wars and threats of wars” will intensify (24:6)
- “Famines and earthquakes” will proliferate (24:7)
- Christians “will be arrested, persecuted, and killed” (24:9)
- Those who are not true believers will “turn away” from Christ (24:10)
- The gospel “will be preached throughout the whole world” (24:14)

Jesus said these distressing events will only intensify like labor pains (24:8). They'll then crescendo to the next and most severe sign: the “abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet” (24:15 NASB). When those who are alive see *this* sign, more misery than any human can imagine will follow:

“There will be greater anguish than at any time since the world began.” (24:21)



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More Misery Than We Can Imagine

Matthew 24:15–28

Talk about a warning that'll make us shudder! So what event, exactly, did Daniel prophesy? What makes it so cataclysmic? How do Jesus' warnings concern us? In this study, we'll discover the answers, and we'll learn the outcome of creation's travail—the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds and the birth of a new age.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The same One who issues the warnings also provides the shelter. As you open this prophetic section of Scripture, adapt the psalmist's confidence in God into your own prayer of faith in God's loving care for you through future storms.

*"How precious is your unfailing love, O God!
All humanity finds shelter
in the shadow of your wings." (Psalm 36:7)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 24:15–28* thoughtfully, aloud if possible. The passage focuses on Jesus' somber forecast of the "abomination of desolation . . . standing in the holy place" (Matthew 24:15 NASB). In the interpretation phase, we'll explore the meaning of this mysterious event. For now, let's consider the terrible consequences of this "abomination" (NASB) or "sacrilegious object" (NLT).



Observation: The Tribulation Reaches Its Zenith

The extreme language of prophecy can leave us scratching our heads in confusion. What does the author mean? However, before we attempt to interpret prophetic passages, we should simply observe them. What does the author say?¹ Use your skills of observation to answer the following questions.



More Misery Than We Can Imagine

Matthew 24:15–28

The Consequences of Unrestrained Evil—Matthew 24:15–26

According to [Matthew 24:15–18](#), what did Jesus instruct people to do right away when the “abomination of desolation” appears? What do the examples of the person on the roof and the person in the field illustrate?

Why might a pregnant or nursing woman be in more danger in a time of distress ([Matthew 24:19](#))? How would winter or the Sabbath cause a person to be in more peril ([24:20](#))?

According to [24:21–22](#), what reason did Jesus give to warrant ringing such an urgent alarm?



More Misery Than We Can Imagine

Matthew 24:15–28

In life-or-death situations, people naturally look to saviors for help and sages for understanding. According to [Matthew 24:23–26](#), what did Jesus say about trusting “false messiahs” and “false prophets” during this period of tribulation? What will make people more likely to be duped by these charlatans?

Satan has an enormous amount of supernatural power. People have the idea that if a miracle occurs, it could only come from God. But Jesus gave an example of signs and wonders coming from the deceiver. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Culmination of All Things—Matthew 24:27–28

All of Jesus’ prophecies lead up to what final event, according to [Matthew 24:27–28](#)? How did Jesus describe the suddenness of this event? What ominous image did Jesus use to sum up all the signs?

The return of Jesus will be like a giant bolt of lightning flashing from horizon to horizon. No one will miss Jesus when He returns. Unlike false messiahs cowering in the desert, Jesus will appear with such power and glory that the whole world will see Him!

In the next *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll discover more details about Christ’s return and how we prepare for Him. Until then, let’s take a closer look at that mysterious event Daniel prophesied.



More Misery Than We Can Imagine

Matthew 24:15–28



Interpretation: The Abomination of Desolation

What is the “abomination of desolation”? Perhaps the better question is, *Who*?

In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll discusses the possible identity of this enigmatic prophetic figure. Read pages 208–210 to answer the following questions. Other resources include [The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament](#) and the online commentary, [Constable's Notes](#), at netbible.org.

Daniel's prophecy appears to have “near” and “far” referents, pointing to two abominations that have already occurred and an abomination yet to come. What two events in Jewish history foreshadowed the ultimate fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy?

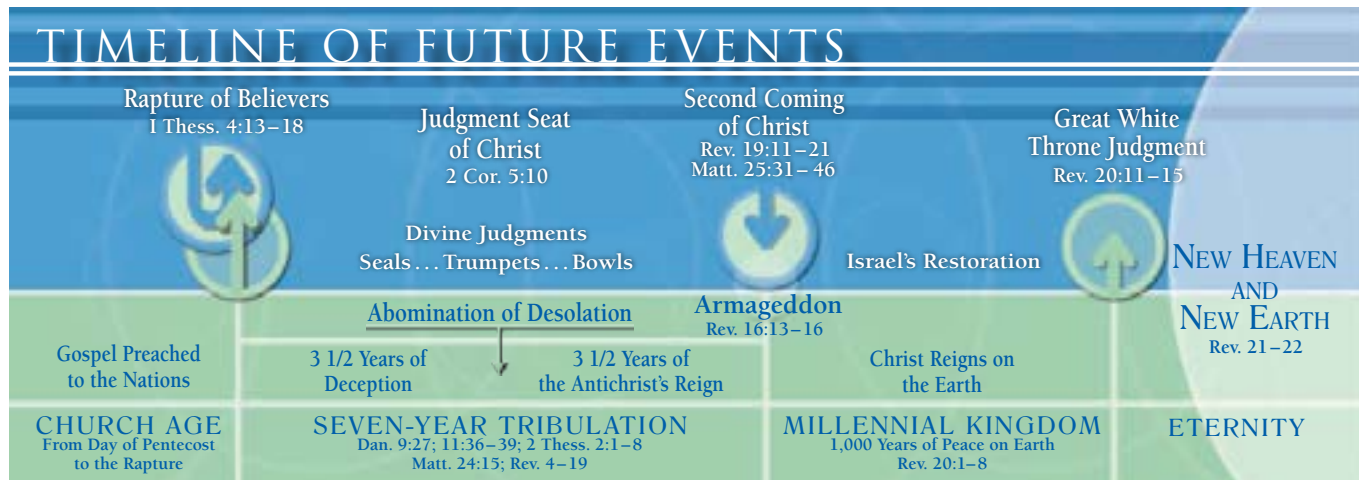
Who will personify the “abomination of desolation” in the future?



More Misery Than We Can Imagine

Matthew 24:15–28

The following chart, “Timeline of Future Events,” illustrates the sequence of events in biblical prophecy, including the rapture of believers, the seven-year tribulation, and the second coming of Christ.²



According to this timeline, when will the “abomination of desolation” occur?

The rise of the Antichrist will imperil all creation to such a degree that if God would not stop the destruction, “not a single person will survive” (Matthew 24:22). What horrors will the Antichrist unleash, and who are “God’s chosen ones” that Jesus mentions (24:22)? Let’s answer these questions by correlating Jesus’ teaching with other passages of Scripture.

We’ve seen people running for their lives before, but nothing will compare to this scene in the future: refugees, worldwide, running to find any place to hide. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



More Misery Than We Can Imagine

Matthew 24:15–28



Correlation: The Antichrist

Paul referred to the Antichrist as “the man of lawlessness” and “the son of destruction” (2 Thessalonians 2:3 NASB). According to [2 Thessalonians 2:3–4](#), what blasphemies will this individual commit by “standing in the Holy Place” in the temple (Matthew 24:15)?

According to [2 Thessalonians 2:9–10](#), with whom is the Antichrist in league, and what will the Antichrist do?

Referring to the Antichrist as “the beast,” John added what further details to Paul’s description, according to [Revelation 13:5–7](#)?



More Misery Than We Can Imagine

Matthew 24:15–28

The persecuted Christians who suffer under the “abomination of desolation” will be those who believe in Christ after the rapture during the tribulation. They are “the chosen ones” whom Jesus addressed in His Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:24). What about us? Jesus will rescue Church Age believers “from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10 NASB) when He gathers His church at the rapture (4:16–17). We won’t be victims of the Antichrist, but we can still learn from Jesus’ warnings and apply His teaching to the times in which we live.

We’re going through treacherous times. Are you living your life in abundance or are you running scared? The Bible has words of encouragement for you that will help.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: How We Can Live Confidently Today

Few eras in history are as volatile as our present day. Terrorists attack, rogue nations threaten to wipe us off the map, crazed gunmen shoot indiscriminately into crowds of innocent people. In the recent COVID-19 pandemic, viral villains invaded every corner on Earth. It feels like we’re getting a dose of future miseries now! Here are three thoughts to steady our nerves.

First, *reject every temptation to live in fear*. The Lord says through Isaiah, “Don’t be afraid, for I am with you” (Isaiah 41:10), and Paul reminds us, “God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Second, *remember God is not almost sovereign*. He is not “mostly” but *fully* in control at all times. He “does as he wishes” (Psalm 115:3), and He will cause “everything to work together for the good of those who love [Him]” (Romans 8:28).

Third, *rely on the Word of God anytime you feel uncertain and insecure*. God’s Word is “a light” for our paths in dark days (Psalm 119:105). As believers, we stand firm on the rock of God’s truth to “give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God’s promises to be fulfilled” (Romans 15:4).



More Misery Than We Can Imagine

Matthew 24:15–28

Which of these applications best fits your need today? Set to memory the verses referenced and quote them often.

Nothing stabilizes us in treacherous times like God's Spirit through His Word. At the center of Scripture is the hope we have in Jesus Christ, whose promises are true and whose coming is as certain as the dawn of a new day.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, all creation longs for Christ's return. Like a woman in labor, nature convulses until Your Son returns and a new kingdom is born. Help me to keep my heart faithful to Jesus and my eyes fixed on Your future. Keep me always hopeful for a better day in Your great new world. In Christ's name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).
2. The chart, "[Timeline of Future Events](#)," can be purchased at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org) as a bookmark with explanatory details on the reverse side.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY ELEVEN

Here He Comes, Ready or Not

Matthew 24:29–25:46

The thought of Christ's return gives great comfort to those who anticipate it. Finally, we will be able to see the One in whom we have believed. We will know Him just as He has always known us.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As Jesus continued His sermon on the Mount of Olives—the *Olivet Discourse* about the end times—He reached the highpoint of His teaching.

“And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens.”
(Matthew 24:30)

Everything Jesus had taught so far led up to His glorious coming again, and everything He was about to teach flowed from this revelation. The first half of His discourse listed the *signs of His return*; now, in the second half, Jesus' focus shifts to *how we're to live in light of His return*.

The next time Jesus entered Jerusalem He would offer Himself as the Lamb of God to die for the sins of the world. But at this moment, as He sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem, Jesus' focus went beyond His first advent to His second advent, when He would appear not as a suffering servant, but as conquering King to judge and reign.

As twilight shadows lengthened over the city, Jesus could see the dawn of a glorious new age in God's redemptive plan. How could He pass along this vision to His followers? How could He best prepare them as they await the glory of His return? Let's discover the answers as we overview the remainder of Jesus' Olivet Discourse.



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Here He Comes, Ready or Not

Matthew 24:29–25:46



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Waiting is an essential component of faith. Because we trust God, we wait for Him, and as we wait, our faith grows deeper. Are you in a season of waiting? Prepare your heart for Jesus' words on staying faithful and keeping alert by letting the words of the psalmist guide your time of prayer:

*“Wait patiently for the LORD.
Be brave and courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the LORD.” (Psalm 27:14)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

According to the “Timeline of Future Events” chart in our previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, the second coming of Christ will occur at the end of the seven-year tribulation after the “abomination of desolation” with all its terrors (Matthew 24:15 NASB). Christ will have already raptured His church—including all believers living and dead in our present age. So, the primary recipients of Jesus' teaching will be those who believe in Jesus *after* the rapture who must endure the persecutions of the tribulation.

While Jesus' words apply directly to believers in the tribulation, they still ring true for us today. Our first step in this *Searching the Scriptures* study is to observe what Jesus said in Matthew 24:29–25:46, and then we can construct timeless principles that apply to believers in any age.¹



Observation: Encouragement for End Times

We can divide the second half of Jesus' discourse into five sections. Answer the questions under each of the following headings as you read and summarize the passages.



Here He Comes, Ready or Not

Matthew 24:29–25:46

The Coming of Christ with Power and Glory—Matthew 24:29–31

Describe what will happen on earth and in the heavens when Christ returns, according to [Matthew 24:29–31](#).

The Certainty of Christ's Coming—Matthew 24:32–34

What guarantee did Christ give that His prophecy will be fulfilled, according to [Matthew 24:32–34](#)?

The Suddenness of Christ's Coming—Matthew 24:36–44

How did Jesus describe the sudden and unexpected nature of His coming, according to [Matthew 24:36–44](#)?
With what two commands in [24:42–44](#) did He sum up this section?



Here He Comes, Ready or Not

Matthew 24:29–25:46

How to Keep Watch and Be Ready—Matthew 24:45–25:30

In this lengthy section, Jesus told three parables to illustrate *how* to “keep watch” and “be ready”—the parable of the good and evil servants, the parable of the ten bridesmaids, and the parable of the talents.

How does the parable of the good and evil servants in [Matthew 24:45–51](#) illustrate the need to be responsible?

How does the parable of the ten bridesmaids in [25:1–13](#) illustrate the need to be wise?

How does the parable of the talents in [25:14–30](#) illustrate the need to be faithful?



Here He Comes, Ready or Not

Matthew 24:29–25:46

The Separation of the Sheep and Goats—Matthew 25:31–46

Jesus concluded His Olivet Discourse with a scene of Christ's judgment at the end of the tribulation to determine who will enter His kingdom. How does Jesus' teaching about the separation of the sheep and goats in [Matthew 25:31–46](#) describe the true righteousness of those who follow Christ?

The issue in eternity will be what did you do in your life with Christ? Did you trust Him as your Savior, or did you reject Him? If you trusted Him, you will stand before the Lord confident that the blood of Christ has opened the door of heaven for you by His grace.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Principles for End-Times Living

A biblical principle is a truth from God's Word that applies to all people at all times. Below are seven biblical principles that Pastor Chuck Swindoll observed in Jesus' Olivet Discourse and the supporting verses.

1. The delay until Christ's second coming will be lengthy, so wait patiently ([Matthew 24:30](#); [25:5, 19](#)).
2. Christ's return will be unexpected and sudden, so don't cling to this world ([24:37–39, 42–44, 50](#)).
3. God's judgment will be irreversible, so take God seriously ([25:29–30, 46](#)).
4. The truth about each person's life will be revealed, so avoid hypocrisy ([25:10–12](#)).
5. Each person must stand alone, so be ready to give an account ([24:40–41](#)).
6. The future of the faithful will be joyful, so rest in His promise ([24:31, 46–47; 25:34–36](#)).
7. The destiny of the lost will be dreadful, so tell others about Jesus ([24:51; 25:30, 46](#)).



Here He Comes, Ready or Not

Matthew 24:29–25:46

Based on your observations of Jesus' teaching, what principles can you add to Pastor Chuck's list?

Before we apply these principles to daily living, let's correlate Jesus' teaching about His second coming with what Peter wrote about skeptics in his second epistle.

Some people fight against the thought of Christ's return. They are skeptical to the core.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Skeptics Will Scoff at Christ's Coming

Peter warned believers who faithfully keep watch for Christ's coming that skeptics will chide them, saying, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again?" (2 Peter 3:4).

According to [2 Peter 3:8–9](#), what encouragement did Peter give us to not give up hope, despite the Lord's lengthy delay? What is the Lord's reason for delaying?



Here He Comes, Ready or Not

Matthew 24:29–25:46

What did Peter say the Lord will do when He returns, according to [2 Peter 3:10–13](#)?

How should we live in the meantime ([3:14](#))?

God will not forget your work as you minister for Christ. One day, when the curtain closes and the earth passes away, He will reward you for your faithfulness.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: How We Can Live Confidently Today

Like the disciples, we want to know when the end will come because our hearts yearn for the Lord to fill the world with His righteousness. Teachers who claim to be able to read current events as if they were the hands on an end times clock may dazzle us with their insights. Yet Christ told us to be wary of date-setters. No one knows when He will come, not even the angels.



Here He Comes, Ready or Not

Matthew 24:29–25:46

While we wait, He urged us to carry on His ministry like responsible servants, prepare for Him like wise bridesmaids, and make good use of our gifts like faithful stewards. What are some ways you can apply Christ's instructions on how to "keep watch" and "be ready?"

Review Pastor Chuck's principles and the ones you wrote. What one action point can you draw from these principles to apply today?

Perhaps you know skeptics who ridicule the thought of Christ's return. Deep down, they long for the same confidence about the future that you have as a follower of Christ. Don't be shy about your hope in Jesus. As you close this study, ask the Lord for courage to share your faith as you wait patiently for His return. Someday, He will come for His own; we can be certain of that fact. Today may be the day . . . come, Lord Jesus! Come!



Here He Comes, Ready or Not

Matthew 24:29–25:46



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I pray for those who do not know You and live without hope. Thank You for Your desire that no one be destroyed in the coming judgment and for everyone, particularly my lost friends and family members, to be saved. Help me have the boldness to share my hope in You and give me the energy and strength to carry on Your Son's ministry until He returns. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at insight.org.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY TWELVE

Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

Matthew's account from here on rivets on the cross. The mysterious plan of God dovetails with the hatred of humankind, and we see God at work to bring His Son to the purpose of His coming.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AFTER finishing His *Olivet Discourse* with its lofty visions of the future, Jesus drew His disciples' attention down to Earth and back to the present: "As you know, Passover begins in two days" (Matthew 26:2).

Jesus had come to Jerusalem with His disciples to celebrate Passover, an annual festival these men had celebrated many times before. But this Passover would be different. In a few days, Jesus would lay down His life as the paschal lamb slain for the sins of the world. He reminded His disciples the real reason for His coming to Jerusalem: "and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified" (26:2).

The time for Christ's death was growing closer. The eleventh hour had struck. Every tick of the clock now carried the cadence of His slow and agonizing march to the cross. As we'll see in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, the countdown begins with a group of powerful religious leaders plotting to murder Jesus and a friend planning to betray Him.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Remarkably, Jesus had *just* announced His coming in glory. "For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes" (Matthew 24:27). The contrasting images of His coming and His crucifixion jolt our senses. How can the all-powerful King of the universe hang on a cross to die? The answer: He chose this death because He loves us.



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Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

What emotions does Jesus' loving sacrifice stir in your heart? Take a moment to express your devotion to Him as you walk with Jesus through these events of Holy Week known as the Passion of Christ.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 26:1–16* as if you were witnessing the events firsthand. Notice how Matthew switches locations as a director of a film might cut from scene to scene. The gospel writer ushers his readers from the Mount of Olives into the residence of Caiaphas. Then he invites us to a dinner party in Bethany and takes us back to Jerusalem for a clandestine meeting.

What feelings does the quick pace of this passage and its dramatic contrasts create in you?



Observation: Preparing, Planning, Pouring, and Plotting

Observing a passage of Scripture shouldn't be done in a hurry. Take time to notice how Matthew purposefully selected each word and constructed each sentence. Pick out the action words and note the tense of the verbs. Watch for the transitions that mark the sequence of events, such as "When Jesus had finished saying all these things" (Matthew 26:1), "At that same time" (26:3), and "Meanwhile" (26:6). Keep developing your skills of observation, and watch Scripture come alive!¹



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

Preparing the Disciples—Matthew 26:1–2

What subtle details do you observe in the timing and content of Jesus' words to His disciples in *Matthew 26:1–2*?²

How does His statement compare with previous foretelling of His suffering and death in *16:21*; *17:12*, *22–23*; *20:18–19*, *22–23*; and *21:38–39* (the murdered “son” represents Jesus)?

Planning a Murder—Matthew 26:3–5

What do you observe in *Matthew 26:3–5*? Who are the characters? When, where, and why did they meet? What concerned them?



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

What contrasts do you see Matthew drawing between Jesus (the perfect High Priest) and Caiaphas (the political high priest)?

Pouring the Perfume—Matthew 26:6–13

From the sinister scene at Caiaphas' luxurious residence, Matthew cuts to the humble home of Simon, a former leper whom Jesus had likely cleansed. What did the woman do that no one expected, according to [Matthew 26:6–7](#)? What do her actions communicate about her heart for Jesus?

What shortsighted, even sinful, perspectives may have prompted the disciples' reaction in [26:8–9](#)? How did they rationalize their criticism?



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

What lessons did Jesus teach about priorities and worship through His words to the woman, according to *Matthew 26:10–13*?

Plotting the Betrayal—Matthew 26:14–16

What do you observe in Judas Iscariot's actions in *26:14–16*? What does his question tell you about his character?

What contrasts do you see Matthew drawing between the woman and Judas Iscariot? The woman worshiped Jesus at the cost of her perfume, but what did Judas' actions cost him in the end? How have these two individuals been remembered through time?

The woman came to Jesus overwhelmed with adoration. Knowing she may never see Him again, she brought her most expensive possession and poured it over Him. For days, others around Him could smell the fragrance of her worship. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16



Interpretation: Examining the Hearts of Caiaphas and Judas

Let's use our interpretive “stethoscope” to examine the hearts of Caiaphas and Judas Iscariot.

First, what background information about Caiaphas can you discover in your resources that might reveal his motives? Read page 233 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, to gain insight into this man's character. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](http://net.bible.org) at net.bible.org. Write down your insights into what may have motivated the most powerful religious and political Jewish leader in Jerusalem to want to murder Jesus.

Second, what insights can you learn about Judas Iscariot from John's parallel account of this scene in [John 12:1–8](#)? What was the real reason behind Judas Iscariot's reaction to the woman's anointing of Jesus? How do you think Satan may have used this incident as the final push to drive Judas to betray Jesus?

What common characteristics link Caiaphas' and Judas' treacherous hearts?



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

*There's an old English couplet I've quoted for years:
"Still, as of old, man by himself is priced.
For thirty pieces, Judas sold himself, not Christ."
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Correlation: Examining the Heart of Mary

According to John's parallel account, Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, was the woman who anointed Jesus. What does her previous encounter with Jesus in her home tell you about her heart, according to [Luke 10:38–42](#)?

What further insight into her character can you gather from her encounter with Jesus when He arrived in Bethany after Lazarus died, according to [John 11:31–44](#)? What do you think her tears communicated to Jesus? How did Jesus' actions link her heart to His and strengthen her faith in Him?



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

Perhaps Mary heard Jesus say to the disciples that He would be “handed over to be crucified” (Matthew 26:2). If so, how might knowing Jesus would soon die a terrible death on a cross have motivated her to anoint Jesus as she did?

What do Mary's actions teach about the nature of true worship?

You may worship in your car or alone on a walk or while gazing at a marvelous scene that only God could have created. Let out your worship! While lost in praise, Mary cared little about what others thought and even less what they said. Her model is marvelous to witness.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Worship Amidst Murder and Betrayal

It's no accident that Matthew inserted the scene of Mary worshiping Jesus between the scenes of Caiaphas plotting to murder Jesus and Judas selling Him out. Such pure devotion amidst such insidious treachery!

Jesus received these extremes with calm assurance in the Father's providential plan. He was resolved to sacrifice Himself for all people, even those who hated Him. Truly, He is worthy of our praise!



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

How does Mary's devotion to Jesus inspire you in your walk with Christ?

What qualities of Jesus revealed in Matthew 26:1–16 increase your love for Him and strengthen your faith in Him?



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study by prayerfully reciting the lyrics of an 18th century hymn of devotion penned by Samuel Stennett. As Mary poured out her most precious perfume, offer the fragrance of your worship to the Lord.

Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned³

Majestic sweetness sits enthroned
upon the Savior's brow;
His head with radiant glories crowned,
His lips with grace o'erflow,
His lips with grace o'erflow.

No mortal can with Him compare,
among the sons of men;
fairer is He than all the fair
who fill the heav'nly train,
who fill the heav'nly train.

He saw me plunged in deep distress,
and flew to my relief;
for me He bore the shameful cross,
and carried all my grief,
and carried all my grief.

To Him I owe my life and breath,
and all the joys I have;
He makes me triumph over death,
and saves me from the grave,
and saves me from the grave.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](http://insight.org)" at insight.org.
2. Matthew used the phrase, "When Jesus had finished," to indicate major turning points in His account (*Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1*). The phrase in *Matthew 26:1* signals the turning point of Matthew's gospel to its climactic theme, the passion and triumph of Christ (*26:1–28:20*).
3. Samuel Stennett, "Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned," Hymnary.org.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY THIRTEEN

Soul-Searching during Supper

Matthew 26:17–30

When Jesus gave Judas the bread dipped in the bowl, it was Jesus' way of saying, "It isn't too late. I know what you've been doing. This is My last offer for you to repent."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PASSOVER commemorates God's rescue of the Hebrews after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. On the night God delivered His people, He sent a plague of death upon the land. To spare His people, God told them to smear the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorposts of their homes. God would pass over the Hebrews' homes, but the firstborn of the Egyptians whose homes were not marked by the blood would perish (Exodus 12:1–30).

As darkness fell that night, the Hebrews ate a meal of the roasted lamb they slaughtered, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. Dressed, packed, and ready to flee, they ate in haste because their deliverance was near. Devastated by this terrible plague, Pharaoh released the Israelites the next morning. Freedom at last! "This is a day to remember," the Lord told Moses, instituting Passover as an annual festival to be celebrated "from generation to generation" (Exodus 12:14).

Each year, thousands of Jews from around the world crowded into Jerusalem to sacrifice their Passover lambs in the temple and prepare their meal of deliverance. For many, this ritual fulfilled a lifelong dream. They came to bask in the temple's purifying light. To hear songs of praise sung in a dozen languages. To sip the cup of freedom with their fellow Jews. To pray that, maybe this year, God would send the next Moses—their divine deliverer, the Messiah.

This year, their prayers were answered.



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Soul-Searching during Supper

Matthew 26:17–30



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Imagine joining the disciples gathering in the room with Jesus to celebrate Passover. Little did they realize that the fulfillment of all the ancient symbols and traditions was reclining at the table with them! Ask God to reveal the meaning of Passover as it is fulfilled in Jesus.

*“In my distress I prayed to the LORD,
and the LORD answered me and set me free.” (Psalm 118:5)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The previous passage left off with Judas pocketing his blood money and “looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus” (Matthew 26:16). Judas’ evil deed formed a dark backdrop for the events surrounding Passover, although the disciples knew nothing about the secret treachery. Jesus, on the other hand, knew everything.

Read [Matthew 26:17–30](#), noting the sub-text woven throughout the passage—the unstated message of Jesus’ words that only He and Judas (and Matthew’s readers) perceived.



Observation: The Soul-Searching Interplay between Jesus and Judas

In the observation phase, we examine the details of a biblical passage like a detective might look for clues.¹ Read Matthew 26:17–30 again, and this time look closer at the questions asked by the disciples. What do you notice about them?



Soul-Searching during Supper

Matthew 26:17–30

The disciples didn't know where they would eat the Passover meal, perhaps because Jesus wanted to keep the location hidden from Judas. How did Jesus move from a general statement to the group in [Matthew 26:21](#) to a specific indictment in [26:25](#) that only Judas heard?

Continue observing the text closely, looking for repeating concepts. In what ways did Jesus refer to His death, both directly and indirectly?

How might you outline the passage?

While Jesus spoke to the whole group, He was appealing to Judas to confess his sin and repent. “Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!” (26:24 NASB). John's account notes that “Jesus was deeply troubled” (John 13:21). Jesus' warnings overflowed with feelings of compassion and grief.



Soul-Searching during Supper

Matthew 26:17–30

At about the time Jesus reached out to this sinner, He unveiled a new phase in God's plan of redemption for all sinners, memorialized in the Lord's Supper. Let's examine the layers of meaning of this fascinating passage as we dig into the interpretation phase.

I believe Judas expected Jesus to overthrow Rome. Judas was the type who was just waiting for the moment for Jesus to take over. But Jesus didn't. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Freedom from Slavery and Redemption from Sin

The context of this passage and its interpretation is the Passover meal. Use your resources to list the main elements of the meal and their symbolism. Read page 240 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, for a description. Summarize the basic outline of the ceremony.

Jesus made two important statements, “While they were eating” (Matthew 26:21) and “As they were eating” (26:26). This “eating” point in the ceremony probably occurred after Jesus had led the disciples in the first and second cups of wine with their corresponding blessings; after they had partaken of the bitter herbs dipped in the bowl of *haroset* and eaten the unleavened bread; and after they had recalled the Israelites' bitter bondage in Egypt and deliverance.

The Sin of Betrayal

At the point in the ceremony in which they were free to enjoy the meal, Jesus interjected: “One of you will betray me” (26:21). “Surely not I, Lord,” the disciples retorted (26:22 NASB). Then Jesus added, “One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with me will betray me” (26:23).



Soul-Searching during Supper

Matthew 26:17–30

They had all “eaten from this bowl” during the meal. What did Jesus mean? He was probably alluding to a psalm of David, specifically, [Psalm 41:9](#). What do you think Jesus was saying to Judas by referencing this verse?²

In what ways do you think the Israelites’ bondage in Egypt compared to Judas’ bondage to sin?

Judas must have realized that he could hide no dark secrets from the Light of the World, who, after exposing Judas’ sin, showed the way to redemption to all who follow Him in faith.

The Remedy of Redemption

“As they were eating” (26:26), Jesus broke from the Passover liturgy to institute a completely new memorial for His followers. What meaning did He give the bread and the cup of wine, according to [26:26–28](#)?



Soul-Searching during Supper

Matthew 26:17–30

Jesus gave a piece of bread and offered a sip of wine to each person. What does the disciples' eating and drinking represent?

On the night of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt, God's plague of death *passed over* the Israelites' homes, allowing the Israelites to *pass through* their blood-stained doorways into a new life of freedom.

How does this ancient deliverance compare with the redemption Jesus offered all people through His body and blood, "poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many" (Matthew 26:28)?

Jesus' confronting Judas' terrible sin in the context of the Passover meal creates a beautiful picture of redemption memorialized in the Lord's Supper. Let's take a look at how other New Testament authors explained this deeply meaningful institution.

For the first time, the disciples came to terms with their Savior whom they've always had with them. Jesus was saying, "When you observe these elements, My body and My blood, you'll remember My death on your behalf." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Soul-Searching during Supper

Matthew 26:17–30



Correlation: Further Teaching on the Lord's Supper

What additional information about the Lord's Supper does Paul offer in [1 Corinthians 11:23–26](#)? What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper?

The writer to the Hebrews elaborates the meaning of the new covenant in [Hebrews 9:15](#). What is Christ's role in the new covenant? How does the new covenant complete the old?

According to [2 Corinthians 3:6](#), what is our role in the new covenant, and how does the Holy Spirit enable us to fulfill this role?



Soul-Searching during Supper

Matthew 26:17–30



Application: Celebrating the Lord's Supper

Having joined the disciples at the Passover meal with Jesus, we have tasted the bitter herbs of Israel's suffering and eaten the sacrificial lamb, while across the table reclined the Lamb of God Himself. We have taken the broken bread from Him whose body was offered for us. We have received the cup from the one whose blood was poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. Now we are left with the memory of Christ's willing sacrifice on our behalf.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll summarizes the meaning of the Lord's Supper to each believer:

With the Lord's Supper, then, we have a sacred symbol that serves as a frequent reminder—both a solemn and a joyful celebration—of who Jesus is and what He has done to save us. And in this symbol, . . . Jesus gave us something we can not only see, but also touch, taste, smell, and hear. It's a confession and commemoration of the gospel that involves all five senses. What a powerful practice the Lord has left us!³

What do you think about as you survey the communion table at your church? Based on our study of Judas' betrayal, the Passover, and the Lord's Supper, what images can you dwell on to make your communion experience more meaningful?

The Lord's Supper memorializes Christ's sacrificial love for all sinners, even Judas. How can you carry the memory of Christ's love symbolized by the bread and cup throughout your day?



Soul-Searching during Supper

Matthew 26:17–30

Christ still offers us His morsel of love from the Passover meal. Take it. Eat it. Receive His grace, and He will set you free.



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, thank You for the invitation to sit at the table to partake in the Lord's Supper. May I always cherish the grace Christ offers sinners who come in need of deliverance from the taskmaster of sin. As I celebrate communion and sing hymns of consecration and praise, draw me nearer to You than I have ever been before. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](http://insight.org)" at insight.org.
2. In the ancient tradition, Jesus and His disciples reclined at a low table to eat their meal, resting on their left side with their feet outward. Situated on Jesus' right side, according to John's account, John leaned back "on Jesus' bosom" to ask Jesus the identity of the betrayer (John 13:25 NASB). Jesus then dipped a piece of bread in the bowl and gave it to Judas, who was likely reclining to the left of Jesus. Situated at Jesus' back, Judas occupied the place reserved for the host's most trusted friend.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 245.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY FOURTEEN

Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56

Every time I walk the sacred path with Christ to the scene of His passion at Gethsemane, I take in the wonder in silence. There is no way I can even imagine the depth of His anguish.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the upper room, oil lamps threw flickering shadows against the walls as Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover meal. Satan was there, crouching in the darkness, watching and waiting. Jesus dipped a piece of bread into the bowl and offered it to Judas as a final appeal to stop before it was too late. Judas accepted the morsel but rejected the Savior's grace, and Satan pounced. According to John's account,

"When Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus told him, 'Hurry and do what you're going to do.' . . . So Judas left at once, going out into the night." (John 13:27, 30)

Once outside, Judas scurried down the steps and into the street, slipping through the shadows to the chief priest's house. When the door creaked open, Judas ducked inside and a thick curtain of evil descended upon the city. It would be the darkest night the world had ever known, for all the powers of darkness were converging to try to snuff out the Light of the World.

Back in the upper room, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, delivered His Upper Room Discourse (John 14–17), and finished the Passover meal with His disciples. "Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:30).

From this point on, Jesus would not preach any more sermons nor teach His disciples any more lessons. His betrayer had set in motion gears that would not be stopped. Jesus stepped resolutely into the night to face His final hours and the suffering for which He was born.



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Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The time of Christ's suffering between the Last Supper and the grave is known as *the passion*. To prepare your heart to walk with our Savior along this sacred, sorrowful path, let the following lines prompt your own prayer to the Lord:

Father, with head bowed I follow Your Son into His garden of grief where He will agonize on my behalf and willingly offer Himself for me. Break my heart with His sufferings so I may know Him more intimately and love Him more deeply, in His name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus' movements after leaving the upper room were not random or unpredictable—just the opposite. According to Luke's account, Jesus went “as was His custom to the Mount of Olives” and went to “the place,” implying that He went to a specific garden that He had gone to many times before (Luke 22:39–40 NASB). His disciples, including Judas, “knew this place” and would have easily anticipated where He was going (John 18:1–2). *Jesus wanted to be found.*

As you read [Matthew 26:31–56](#), note the precision of Jesus' words and deliberateness of His actions. Jesus was in complete charge of His circumstances. He knew what to say, what would happen, and when it would happen.



Observation: Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

In the observation phase, we look closely at the sequence of events. Nothing in Scripture is out of order or without significance. Read carefully and slowly each phrase in the verses as you answer the following questions.¹



Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56

Predicting the Disciples' Reaction—Matthew 26:31–35

Jesus had already told the disciples, “One of you will betray me” (Matthew 26:21). What did Jesus now tell Peter and the disciples ([Matthew 26:31–35](#))? What was Jesus' tone as He spoke? How did Peter and the other disciples react?

Jesus quoted [Zechariah 13:7](#), which is about the Lord's purifying judgment of His people. How does the Lord's promise in [13:9](#) also apply to the disciples, perhaps encouraging them when they reflected on it later?

The disciples never did get the resurrection until the morning of the resurrection. They were so distraught over Jesus leaving them, they missed some of the things He said.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Praying Alone in the Garden—Matthew 26:36–46

When Jesus arrived at the garden of Gethsemane, His emotional tone intensified. He said, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38). *Gethsemane* means “oil press,” which is a fitting metaphor for the crushing pressure Jesus was about to experience.



Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56

In the interpretation phase, we'll explore the reasons for Jesus' agony. For now, write down what you observe in [Matthew 26:36–46](#). Note the contrasts you see between Jesus and His bleary-eyed disciples.

Jesus pleaded in the most intimate terms, “My Father!” (26:39)—in Mark's account, “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36). What did He ask His Father to do for Him? What did Jesus want more than His own desires?

The agony raging in Jesus' soul reached its apex at Gethsemane where His humanity recoiled over the horrors of the cross. After a struggle, Jesus arrived on the other side fully surrendered to the Father's will, at peace, and *invincible*. Jesus was now ready for what came next.

Responding to the Betrayal and Arrest—Matthew 26:47–56

Without warning, a mob of torch-bearing soldiers burst into the garden with Judas at their head and poison in his kiss. What responses from Jesus in [Matthew 26:47–56](#) express His resolute submission to the Father and selfless love even for His enemies?



Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56

What statements did Jesus repeat in Matthew 26:54, 56? What role do you see the Scriptures playing in Jesus' mind-set?

Jesus had worked out His fears through prayer before the crisis struck. The sleepy disciples, however, were completely unprepared. How did their natural fight-or-flight instincts take over their reactions?

Like rats in a sinking ship, the disciples fled. They deserted Jesus. Every one of them. Even John the beloved. Even the chest-pounding, arrogant Peter ran. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Cup of Wrath

Jesus' obedience to the Father and trust in His care flowed like precious oils from Gethsemane's presses. But His surrender did not come without a fight. His humanity was on full display as He "fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will'" (Matthew 26:39 NASB).²



Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56

To what does “this cup” refer? *Isaiah 51:17–20*; *Jeremiah 25:15*; and *Revelation 14:9–10* give insight into the answer.

Jesus qualified His request with “if it is possible” (Matthew 26:39). If *what* was possible? Jesus asked His Father if the world could be redeemed without Him having to suffer sin’s wrath. Surely, Jesus knew He must drink the cup to redeem the world, but, in His humanity, He longed for another way.

What do the longings of Jesus tell you about His human nature and ability to understand “our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15)?

How can we model Jesus’ prayer?

Jesus willingly accepted the cup, and He took it for you and me. The fight was over. The struggle over drinking the cup was done. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56



Correlation: Help from an Angel

What poignant details did Luke add in his account of Jesus' distress in Gethsemane in [Luke 22:39–45](#)?

This scene forms a bookend with an earlier incident involving angels at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. What similarities do you see between Gethsemane and the wilderness, according to [Matthew 4:8–11](#)?

Whether actual drops of blood poured out of His skin or His sweat poured like drops of blood, Jesus was in severe distress. Peace came in the end when He chose submission to the Father's will and became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8 NASB).



Application: Gethsemane Then and Now

The battle of Calvary was won in the trenches of Gethsemane. But Jesus' victory did not come easily or neatly. So extreme was His travail that He needed an angel's shoulder to lean on. So messy was His labor that His sweat flowed blood-like from His pores, matting His hair and soaking His clothes. Yet, in His submission, He found the Father's peace to carry Him through the suffering to come.

No human can truly comprehend what it was like for sinless Jesus to gaze into sin's cursed cup and to recoil at the fury of God's wrath. But we do experience similar battles of the will. We struggle to release our wants and to accept God's way and to echo Jesus' words to the Father, "Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42).



Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56

Are you experiencing a Gethsemane-like battle? If so, what “cup” are you asking the Lord to take away, if possible?

How long have you struggled with the Lord over this issue? What is the main fear that haunts you? Can you express that fear to the Father?

Ask the Lord to help you voice His prayer of surrender, “If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine” (Matthew 26:39). What would you like to say to your Abba Father in this moment?



Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56

In our soul's garden of grief, we tremble and sweat and cry out to the Lord. Then, somewhere in the midst of our agony, the Lord touches us. The battle over, we leave in peace. Whatever your situation, remember Jesus entered the garden before you, and He's willing to lead you through.



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, in the days ahead, bring to mind the scene of Jesus struggling in prayer and then releasing His will to You. Take me back to Gethsemane where Jesus' soul was pressed into sweet obedience. Help me always remember His agony, which is matched in intensity only by His love. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).
2. Matthew used the imperfect tense, indicating that Jesus continually "fell on His face" in prayer. This description of Jesus in great distress contradicts the image we often see in paintings of Jesus in Gethsemane kneeling serenely with His face toward heaven.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY FIFTEEN

Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75

Jesus was declared guilty of crimes He never committed, endured punishment that should not have been inflicted, and suffered an excruciating death He did not deserve.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AFTER midnight, Jesus entered the darkest hours of the darkest of all nights. Judas had betrayed Him, the soldiers had arrested Him, and His closest friends had deserted Him. Now, the Jewish authorities, who had previously met at Caiaphas' house to plot "how to capture Jesus secretly and kill him" (Matthew 26:4), returned under cover of darkness to enact the next phase of their sinister conspiracy: to put Jesus on trial and sentence Him to die.

During this awful night of evil, however, God was in full control. According to His sovereign plan, the diabolical plot to murder the Son of God would become the means to save the world when Christ bore sin's curse on the cross.

At His arrest, Jesus reassured His disciples that everything was going according to God's plan: "This is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures" (26:56). Without realizing it, Jesus' enemies were following an ancient script crafted in God's eternal decrees, unwitting actors in the drama of redemption.

As we witness the troubling scenes of Jesus' trial and Peter's denials, let's keep one eye on God's higher purpose. During the night before Christ's crucifixion, at humanity's darkest hour, we will witness God working out our salvation as He turns the tables on the schemes of wicked men.



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Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Lamb of God offered Himself just as the prophet Isaiah foretold:

*“He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. . . .
He was humiliated and received no justice.” (Acts 8:32, 33)*

As you prepare your heart for this study and the studies to follow, thank the Lord for His willingness to bear injustice and abuse for our sake:

Dear Father, Jesus gave thanks before breaking the bread at Passover, and now I give thanks as I receive the morsel of grace He offers me in Himself. Fill my soul with wonder, love, and praise as I witness Christ's suffering and remember He endured it all for me. In His name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Without the light of Scripture and the clarity of God's purpose, Peter was groping in the dark as he witnessed the horror of Christ's arrest and trial as they were playing out in real time. His mind was awl with confusion and fear. Read [Matthew 26:57–75](#), noting the parallels between Christ's experience inside Caiaphas' house and Peter's experience in the courtyard.

In a way, both Jesus and Peter were undergoing trials. Accusers hurled charges at both men, and juries (of sorts) declared verdicts. Jesus' trial occurred “on the record” before high-ranking officials, while Peter's trial took place unofficially in private conversations among servants. Let's take a closer look at the circumstances and determine for ourselves who was *really* on trial.



Observation: Jesus on Trial and Peter on Trial

Observe carefully the side-by-side accounts of Jesus and Peter at Caiaphas' house. Watch for the ways Matthew heightens the impact by contrasting the vile hatred toward Jesus inside the house and Peter's tragic denials in the courtyard.



Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75

How does Matthew set the dual scene in *Matthew 26:57–58*?

Jesus on Trial—Matthew 26:59–68

The Sanhedrin, or “high council” (Matthew 26:59), consisted of seventy-one priests, elders, and scribes, with a quorum of twenty-three members required for an official meeting. Caiaphas, the high priest, presided over the trial.

How does Matthew describe the council members’ futile attempts to legitimately charge Jesus, according to *26:59–62*? What conclusion does Matthew want his readers to make about the validity of this trial?¹

Unwilling to even acknowledge the false accusation, “Jesus remained silent” (26:63). The frustrated high priest Caiaphas demanded “in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God” (26:63). What do you observe in Caiaphas’ question?



Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75

Jesus' messianic claim was different than the claims of other so-called messiahs who had come and gone before. According to [Matthew 26:64–68](#), what was unique about Jesus that drew the charge of blasphemy? What did their sadistic violence reveal about the true nature of these men?

Meanwhile, Peter sat in the courtyard, at a distance, watching to see what was going to happen. John's account adds that there was a fire, and, no doubt, faces were visible in the flickering of the fire. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Peter on Trial—Matthew 26:69–75

Although Peter stood in a courtyard, not a courtroom, he was still on trial when three witnesses accused him of following Jesus. According to [Matthew 26:69](#), [71](#), and [73](#), what were the accusations and who made them?

How did Peter's denials become increasingly insistent to the point of extreme, according to [26:70](#), [72](#), and [74](#)?



Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75

Review [Matthew 26:31–35](#) and contrast Peter's boasting before Jesus' arrest with his denials afterward. What realization hit Peter after the rooster crowed, according to [26:74–75](#)?

There are times when tears reveal the first step toward repentance, and Peter's weeping is a case in point. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Messianic Claim

Let's take a closer look at Jesus' response to Caiaphas' demand, "Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63). Jesus said,

"You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:64)

Jesus' remark, "You have said it," was the same he gave Judas earlier when Judas asked, "Rabbi, am I the [betrayor]?" (26:25). Jesus said, in so many words, "Yes, you are, you said it yourself." Similarly, Jesus said to Caiaphas, "Yes, *I am*, just as you say."

To prove His claim in 26:64, Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 and applied these prophecies to Himself. What do these verses below teach about the deity of the Messiah? You may recall that Jesus previously used these verses to teach His divine nature in [24:30–31](#) and [24:41–45](#).



Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75

*The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit in the place of honor at my right hand
until I humble your enemies,
making them a footstool under your feet.” (Psalm 110:1)*

*“I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.” (Daniel 7:13 NASB)*

Jesus had called David and Daniel to testify at Caiaphas' trial—and these witnesses didn't lie! Tragically, the religious authorities in Israel closed their ears to the voices from the past.



Correlation: Added Insight into Peter's Denials

Ironically, Caiaphas echoed Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, when Peter declared, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). However, while Caiaphas was inside making Peter's confession, where was Peter? Outside making denials.

What insight does John give about the circumstances of Peter's first denial, according to [John 18:15–18](#)? (The disciple who asked the doorkeeper to allow Peter into the courtyard was likely John.)



Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75

What was the connection between the servant in [John 18:26](#) and the man who Peter had attacked in Gethsemane? How could this servant have put Peter in grave danger?

What detail does Luke's account add ([Luke 22:60–61](#))?

What do you imagine Jesus communicating to Peter in that moment?

Three things happened simultaneously: the rooster's crow, the glance from the Lord, Peter's realization of his denials. Jesus' prediction was correct, and Peter "went away, weeping bitterly." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75



Application: Lessons from Peter

Bold Peter had declared Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God, in pagan Caesarea Philippi. In response, Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter, the rock (Matthew 16:16–18). Sadly, when the hammer of persecution fell, the rock shattered.

We see ourselves in Peter's fault-lines. Failure is humiliating and devastating. It exposes our inadequacies and reminds us that we are not as impressive as we make ourselves out to be.

Have you had a "Peter" moment in which you fell short of what you vowed? If so, you can understand the bitterness of Peter's grief. What has been the fallout from your failure?

Peter was really the one on trial, and he lost. But we shouldn't judge Peter too harshly, and neither should we be too hard on ourselves. Jesus looks at us in our failure with the same look He gave Peter—not a look of disgust—but of compassion and with a tear of His own. In the end, according to John 21, Jesus restored repentant Peter and gave Him even greater responsibilities.

How might the Lord use your failure to prepare you for His next task for you?



Who's Really on Trial?

Matthew 26:57–75

Remarkably, Peter's downward spiral of denials led him to higher heights of effectiveness. How can that be? Through his failure, Peter learned humility and gratitude—two rocklike qualities of any follower of Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, when I hear the rooster crowing its indictment of my failure, may my grieving soul fly swiftly to Your feet of mercy. Wash me in the spring of Your forgiveness. Set me on my feet again, tempered by the fire of my trials and filled with the courage of the Savior who never trembled. Grant me the grace to reenter the courtyard of my fears and, this time, stand firm. In Christ's name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. "According to the Mishnah, no trials were supposed to occur during the night hours or during feasts (*Sanhedrin* 4:1). Trials were to be public, not secret . . . (*Sanhedrin* 1:6; 11:2). . . . Conviction required the agreement of two or three independent witnesses, who would be examined and cross-examined individually (*Sanhedrin* 3:6; 4:1; cf. Deut. 17:6–7; 19:15–20). . . . And when the trial was over, members of the Sanhedrin were to adjourn for lengthy discussion to weigh the evidence, and the voting for or against conviction was to be done in orderly fashion." Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 264–65.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY SIXTEEN

Thoroughly Innocent . . . Totally Guilty

Matthew 27:1–10

Judas didn't start out to be a traitor. Over time, even though he was in the presence of the one who was absolutely innocent, he became increasingly more guilty. Judas was now trapped in his own sinfulness.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE trial at Caiaphas' house proved one thing: Jesus was thoroughly innocent. The trial itself was a sham. It was held in secret at night, Jesus had no representation, and His accusers lied and couldn't agree on anything (Matthew 26:59–60). Caiaphas was prejudiced against the defendant before the trial even started, having conspired with other council members earlier in the week to kill Jesus (26:3–4). The trial was illegal, but the council declared Jesus guilty anyway and condemned Him to die (26:66).

This unjust trial was one of six described in the Gospels—three Jewish trials and three Roman. Review the details of each trial using the chart, “The Trials of Jesus,” at the end of this *Searching the Scriptures* study. With one voice, all four gospel accounts pronounce Jesus “not guilty.” Judas, on the other hand, was totally guilty.

In Matthew 27:1–10, Matthew shifts the focus to Judas for a brief interlude while Jesus was being transported to Pilate's residence. According to the second chart at the end of this study, “Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha,” this trial before Pilate occurred at 6:30 a.m., which was about the time it dawned on Judas that Jesus' blood was on his hands. The gavel had come down on Judas, and the verdict in his soul rang out. He was guilty of betraying the Son of God.



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Thoroughly Innocent . . . Totally Guilty

Matthew 27:1–10



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Judas' story serves as a warning, but it's also a reminder of how the Lord persistently seeks sinners to save them, even to the point of bearing our sin on His cross. Let the following prayer guide you as you prepare your heart to study God's Word.

Father, Your Son never lifted His hand against His most vicious enemies, even Judas. He loved His traitor to the end and grieved over Judas' sin. Thank You for Your unrelenting pursuit of sinners and Your offer of mercy, even to the worst of sinners, through the cross. In His name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

After condemning Jesus at night at Caiaphas' house, the Sanhedrin held a mock trial in daylight to formalize the verdict they had already reached.

Very early in the morning the leading priests and elders of the people met again to lay plans for putting Jesus to death. Then they bound him, led him away, and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor. (Matthew 27:1–2)

Jesus foretold this exact course of events, including the events to follow (20:18–19). He was the Captain standing at the helm of His circumstances steering the ship of God's plan of redemption along its predetermined course. Even Judas' tragic death fulfilled prophecy, as Matthew demonstrated to his readers.



Observation: Judas' Death and Tragic Legacy

Observation is the first step in *Searching the Scriptures*. We simply look for what's in the verses without attempting to decipher the meaning.¹ How does Matthew describe Judas' emotions and actions in [Matthew 27:3–5](#)? What strikes you about the Sanhedrin members' attitude toward Judas? What tragic action did Judas take in response?



Thoroughly Innocent . . . Totally Guilty

Matthew 27:1–10

What irony do you see in the priests' dilemma over Judas' blood money, according to [Matthew 27:6–8](#)? What admission did they make?

Look up the prophecy Matthew cited: [Zechariah 11:12–13](#).² How was this obscure prophecy fulfilled by the priests?

Judas was in no man's land. He couldn't return to the disciples, and the Jewish leaders wanted nothing to do with him. They had used him, and he was trash to them. He had nowhere to turn. Broken, confused, disillusioned, saturated in guilt, filled with shame, he was without hope. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Judas' Downward Path

Matthew doesn't specify the reasons Judas turned against Jesus, but, from the few Bible references we find, we can create a character composite of a man who would betray his friend. According to [Matthew 26:14–16](#), Judas secretly conspired with the leading priests after Mary anointed Jesus with the expensive perfume. Judas fussed over the waste of money that could have been given to the poor, but according to John's account, Judas was more interested in taking the money for himself than giving it to the poor. "He was a thief," John wrote bluntly (John 12:4–6).

When the leading priests offered him thirty pieces of silver to deliver Jesus to them, greed opened the door to treachery in Judas' heart, and he took the blood money. Skilled at hiding his thievery, Judas was accustomed to dealing in the dark.



Thoroughly Innocent . . . Totally Guilty

Matthew 27:1–10

But how could a man follow Jesus for as many years as Judas did and remain so hardened? On pages 274–275 of his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explores Judas' deeper spiritual issues. What character flaws and misbeliefs do you think may have led to Judas' downfall?

Tragically, Judas went to the chief priests to confess his sin, but they refused to help him. They had what they wanted from him, so he was no use to them anymore. They just tossed him out like worthless garbage. To Jesus, however, every soul has value. He always has compassion and mercy for sinners like Judas, and He died to redeem them. What would you say to give hope to someone today who feels alone and trapped in his or her sin?

The beautiful truth is that Jesus Christ died, even for the hypocrite. The joy is that we have a message of hope and forgiveness for all of us, and it's called "grace."

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Thoroughly Innocent . . . Totally Guilty

Matthew 27:1–10



Correlation: Additional Details from Acts

Luke, the author of Acts, adds some interesting, rather gruesome, details to Judas' death by suicide. What do you discover in [Acts 1:18–19](#)? Consult page 275 of Pastor Chuck's commentary to correlate this passage with Matthew's account. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](#), at [netbible.org](#).

Perhaps the saddest part of Judas' story is that he had plenty of opportunities to choose a different path. At the Passover table, Jesus placed Judas next to Him, confronted him without shaming him, and warned him of the consequences of his sin (Matthew 26:24). Even at the moment of betrayal, Jesus called Judas, "My friend" (26:50). All the way to the end, Jesus extended His hand of mercy to Judas, but Judas refused to take it. What a tragedy.



Application: Warning Signs from the Life of Judas

As we sift through the rubble of Judas' life, we can find four warnings to apply.

1. *Secret sin warps our minds and twists our values.* A lifetime of unconfessed smaller sins distorted Judas' whole character.
2. *All acts of cover-up are deceitful—making self-deception the worst.* The more people Judas fooled, the more lies he told himself to justify his own deceitful actions.
3. *The cycle of compulsion and shame drives a wedge between private thoughts and public persona.* Judas probably believed he was different than the other disciples.
4. *When reality ultimately hits, the deceiver is shocked.* Judas was surprised that his betrayal would lead to Jesus' death. Sin blinded him to reality.



Thoroughly Innocent . . . Totally Guilty

Matthew 27:1–10

Do any of these flashing lights grab your attention as a warning you need to heed today?

If this study has revealed a deep sin issue within you that you need to address, what can you do to deal positively and constructively with it? Compulsions, cover-ups, and shame need not lead us down Judas' path of despair.

Perhaps you suddenly realize you need help. Consult a Christian counselor. Reach out to your pastor or spiritual friend who can embody the care and compassion of Christ for you. Remember, Christ is your lifeline. Grasp it and find mercy and healing today.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, shine Your light in my soul and expose the lies and rationalizations that have led me down the wrong path and kept me doing things I don't want to do. Speak to me in this moment of silence as I look to Your Son for forgiveness, relief, and restoration. I trust in You now as my Savior and Lord, my sole source of light and hope. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.



Thoroughly Innocent . . . Totally Guilty

Matthew 27:1–10

The Trials of Jesus						
Trial	Officiating Authority	Scripture	Accusations	Legality	Type	Result
1	Annas, former high priest AD 6–15	John 18:12–23	No specific charges brought.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No jurisdiction • Held at night • No charges • No witnesses • Abused during trial 	Jewish and religious	Found “guilty” of irreverence and sent to Caiaphas.
2	Caiaphas, high priest AD 18–36, and the Sanhedrin	Matthew 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65; John 18:24	Claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, which they deemed blasphemy.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held at night • False witnesses • No formal charge • Abused during trial 	Jewish and religious	Declared “guilty” of blasphemy and held for sentencing until morning.
3	Sanhedrin	Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66–71	As a continuation of the earlier trial before the Sanhedrin, the charges remained the same.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accusation changed • No witnesses • Improper vote 	Jewish and religious	Sentenced to be turned over to Romans for execution.
4	Pilate, governor of Judea AD 26–36	Matthew 27:11–14; Mark 15:2–5; Luke 23:1–7; John 18:28–38	Charged with treason and sedition against Rome.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found “not guilty,” yet kept in custody • No defense representation • Abused during trial 	Roman and civil	Declared “not guilty” and pawned off on Herod Antipas to find a loophole.



Thoroughly Innocent . . . Totally Guilty

Matthew 27:1–10

The Trials of Jesus <i>continued</i>						
5	Herod Antipas, governor of Galilee 4 BC–AD 39	Luke 23:8–12	No specific charges brought. Questioned at length by Herod.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No jurisdiction • No specific charges • Abused during trial 	Roman and civil	Mistreated, mocked, falsely accused, and returned to Pilate without a decision made.
6	Pilate	Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:13–25; John 18:39–19:16	As a continuation of the earlier trial before Pilate, the charges remained the same.	Illegal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declared “not guilty,” yet condemned. 	Roman and civil	Declared “not guilty” but sentenced to be crucified to mollify the angry mob. Simultaneously, a man guilty of murder, treason, and sedition was released.

Chart adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 263. Copyright © 2020 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha		
Event	Scriptures	Approximate Time
Prayer and agony in Gethsemane	Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46; John 18:1	1:00 a.m.
Betrayal by Judas and arrest of Jesus	Matthew 26:47–56; Mark 14:43–46; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:2–12	1:30 a.m.
Irregular, unauthorized interrogation at Annas' residence	John 18:12–23	2:00 a.m.
Illegal trial at Caiaphas' residence	Matthew 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65; Luke 22:54, 63–65; John 18:24	3:00 a.m.



Thoroughly Innocent . . . Totally Guilty

Matthew 27:1–10

Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha <i>continued</i>		
Formal but illegal meeting of the Sanhedrin to confirm capital sentence	Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66–71	6:00 a.m.
First interrogation by Pilate at his residence	Matthew 27:1–2, 11–14; Mark 15:1–5; Luke 23:1–7; John 18:28–32	6:30 a.m.
Audience before Herod	Luke 23:8–12	7:00 a.m.
Final judgment of Pilate	Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:13–25; John 18:33–40	7:30 a.m.
Scourging in Praetorium, mocking by soldiers, and public condemnation	Matthew 27:26–31; Mark 15:15–20; John 19:1–16	8:00 a.m.
Walk to Golgotha and nailing to the cross	Matthew 27:32–35; Mark 15:21–24; Luke 23:26–33; John 19:17–18	9:00 a.m.
Events at the cross, climaxing in darkness over the land	Matthew 27:36–45; Mark 15:25–33; Luke 23:34–44; John 19:19–27	9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Jesus' final words, death, and earthquake	Matthew 27:46–56; Mark 15:34–41; Luke 23:45–49; John 19:28–30	3:00 p.m.

Chart adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 271. Copyright © 2020 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](http://insight.org)" at insight.org.
2. "This difficult fulfillment seems to be a quotation from Zechariah 11:12–13, but Matthew attributed it to Jeremiah. Probably Matthew was referring to Jeremiah 19:1–13, which he condensed using mainly the phraseology of Zechariah 11:12–13 because of its similarity to Judas' situation." Thomas Constable, "[Matthew 27:9–10](#)," *Constable's Notes*, netbible.org.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY SEVENTEEN

The Strangest of Foursomes

Matthew 27:11–26

On this one day in history, Jesus (the innocent captive), Pilate (the vacillating judge), Barabbas (the notorious criminal), and Mrs. Pilate (the troubled wife) came together, never to be drawn together again.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

FOR many months, Jesus had been parading the transgressions of the religious leaders before the eyes of the nation. He had unmasked their false piety (Matthew 6:1–6), rebuked them for making legal loopholes to avoid obeying God's law (15:3–6), and criticized their worship as “a farce” (15:9). He rained down judgments on them, saying that they were full of greed, self-indulgence, and impurity (23:25–28).

Instead of repenting, the religious leaders determined to extinguish the light that exposed them. They tried tricking Jesus into incriminating Himself, accusing Him of lawbreaking, and even doing miracles by the power of Satan. None of their ploys worked.

The final straw came during Passover when Jesus single-handedly shut down their lucrative extortion racket by toppling the tables in the temple. Throughout the week, every verbal attack they launched, He turned back on them and sent them away embarrassed and fuming.

To the commoner, Jesus had become a national hero; but to the elite in their crumbling ivory towers, He was *enemy number one*.



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The Strangest of Foursomes

Matthew 27:11–26

So, when the chief priests, scribes, and elders had Jesus in their clutches at Caiaphas' house, they didn't waste the opportunity to take their pound of flesh. Caiaphas asked their verdict of his charge of blasphemy, and they howled, "Guilty!" and "He deserves to die!" (Matthew 26:66). Unleashed, they encircled Jesus like mad dogs, spitting on Him, beating Him, slapping Him from His blind side, and taunting, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who hit you that time?" (26:67–68).

When the rising sun finally put an end to their cruel sport, they called to order a formal meeting of the Sanhedrin, ratified the death sentence, and hauled Jesus to Pilate to order His execution. Here, we pick up Matthew's account with Jesus beaten and bloodied, "standing before Pilate, the Roman governor" (27:11).



PREPARE YOUR HEART

In the enraged faces of the religious leaders, we see all of humanity's sins on awful display—envy, pride, hatred, guile, prejudice, revenge, anger, and murder. We grieve for the suffering of our Lord and all the suffering inflicted by sin in our broken world. Prepare your heart for studying this phase of Jesus' passion with the following prayer:

Father, as I witness the weight of humanity's crimes bearing down on Jesus, I see the accumulated suffering of the world in His beaten body. Through my study, break my heart for the hurting, deepen my devotion to Christ, and fill me with His love for my enemies as I follow Him. In His name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read [Matthew 27:11–26](#) and review the two charts, "Trials of Jesus" and "Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha" in the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study. Notice that Matthew connects the fourth trial before Pilate (Matthew 27:11–14) with details from the sixth trial (27:15–26), omitting the fifth trial before Herod Antipas.



Observation: Jesus before Pontius Pilate

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we try to imagine ourselves in the biblical scene.¹ The setting was Pilate's headquarters in Jerusalem. His home was in Caesarea, but for festivals such as Passover, he would stay in a secondary residence in Jerusalem where additional soldiers were stationed to suppress uprisings.



The Strangest of Foursomes

Matthew 27:11–26

John tells us that the religious leaders refused to enter Pilate's residence "because it would defile them" (John 18:28). So, Pilate went out to speak to the accusers, perhaps by stepping onto a balcony overlooking a courtyard and stepping back in to speak to Jesus.

The Sanhedrin charged Jesus with blasphemy, which was punishable by death under Jewish law but not Roman law. Luke informs us how the accusers twisted the charges into a Roman capital offense: "This man has been leading our people astray by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming he is the Messiah, a king" (Luke 23:2).

What surprised Pilate about Jesus' answer to his question and response to his accusers, according to [Matthew 27:11–14](#)? What words do other Bible versions use to describe Pilate's reaction to Jesus in [27:14](#)?

Pilate didn't see in Jesus the defiant spirit of a political revolutionary like, say, Barabbas, who had been convicted of insurrection. Pilate was unconvinced of Jesus' guilt, but he was also unwilling to provoke the Jewish authorities by releasing Jesus. Caught in a dilemma, Pilate tried shifting responsibility so he didn't have to issue a verdict. What did he do in [Matthew 27:15–18](#)?



The Strangest of Foursomes

Matthew 27:11–26

While waiting for the crowd's response, what happened to further convince Pilate of Jesus' innocence (*Matthew 27:19*)?

Can you sense Pilate's intense inner turmoil? What caused the situation to escalate to the point of mob violence in *27:20–26*? How did Pilate try to shift responsibility again? What happened at the end of this final trial?

I'm convinced that Jesus died on a cross prepared for Barabbas. No one ever could say like Barabbas, "He died in my place," as Barabbas could say it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Man Who Missed His Cross

Barabbas is an Aramaic name that means either “son of the father” (*bar-abba*) or “son of the teacher” (*bar-rabban*). Some early Greek manuscripts of Matthew's gospel render his name as Jesus Barabbas. Noting *Matthew 1:21*, what striking comparisons and contrasts can you make between Jesus Barabbas the revolutionary and Jesus Christ the Redeemer?



The Strangest of Foursomes

Matthew 27:11–26

According to [Mark 15:7](#); [Luke 23:19](#); and [John 18:40](#), what crimes did Barabbas commit? What would have been his punishment for these crimes?

What theological truth does the release of guilty Barabbas and the execution of innocent Jesus in his place illustrate? For help with the answer, read page 279 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*. Also, reflect on [Isaiah 53:4–6](#) and [1 Peter 2:22–25](#).

Can you imagine Barabbas hearing the Roman soldiers marching toward his cell and opening the door? They grab him and drag him out, and he is certain he is heading for crucifixion. But when he comes out of his cell, he's a free man. He's pardoned to watch the crucifixion of the One who took his place on his cross. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Strangest of Foursomes

Matthew 27:11–26



Correlation: John's Description of the Final Trial

John's account fills in some dialogue between Pilate and Jesus that further demonstrates Jesus' innocence in Pilate's mind. What did Jesus say to Pilate in private to reach out to him, according to [John 18:33–39](#)?

Even after Pilate ordered Jesus to be flogged, perhaps to satisfy the crowd's thirst for blood and avoid the need for crucifixion, Jesus still spoke kindly to Pilate. What did Jesus say in [John 19:10–16](#) to illustrate God's sovereign hand guiding this evil scene?

What do you make of Pilate? Was he responsible for Christ's death or a victim of his circumstances?

Jesus, Pilate, Barabbas, and Pilate's wife came together in a brief period of time and played such a significant role in the final trials of Jesus and, ultimately, His death. There are lessons to learn from each of these four. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Strangest of Foursomes

Matthew 27:11–26



Application: Lessons from the Strangest Foursome

What lessons can we draw from the example of each of the characters who played a role in our passage?

1. *Jesus, the innocent captive.* He inspires us to stand firm, without wavering, with few words when we know we're right.
2. *Pilate, the vacillating judge.* His example teaches us to listen to the voice of integrity, not the shouts of the majority, when we face a dilemma.
3. *Barabbas, the notorious criminal.* He lives because of the power of Christ's substitutionary death. Grace gives us the pardon we don't deserve and the power to live free.
4. *Mrs. Pilate, the troubled wife.* Sounding a warning to those you love may spare them disaster.

Which of these characters do you most need to model in your current circumstances? In what ways?

As you close this study, take a moment to marvel at Jesus who didn't sin when sinned against, nor retaliate when insulted, nor seek revenge for His sufferings. His own people shouted for His death, and the worst of men took delight in His pain, but He only returned good for evil, love for hate. Innocent in every way and perfectly pure, He bore our sins just as He bore Barabbas' crimes. Why? To open our prison cells and set us free!



The Strangest of Foursomes

Matthew 27:11–26



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, When I consider the price Your Son paid to ransom my captive soul, it causes me to tremble. Such love. Such sacrifice. I am left with only one response. Such an extreme price for my salvation calls for extreme devotion, which I freely give to the One who suffered so I might be healed, who died so I might live. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY EIGHTEEN

Those Final, Dreadful Hours

Matthew 27:27–50

God gave us His one and only Son to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. It took a spotless Lamb, Jesus, who was willing to bear the sins of the whole world. All our sins are fully and completely forgiven.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

TO die on a cross was to die in shame. Even the Romans believed crucifixion to be “a most cruel and disgusting punishment.”¹ To the Jews, it was particularly vile. They categorized crucifixion with hanging, applying Deuteronomy 21:23 to both: “anyone who is hung is cursed in the sight of God.”

No right-thinking person would honor a crucified man, much less worship him. Yet, Christians look at Jesus and see God in human flesh, humbling Himself “to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8 NASB). We see in Jesus’ death the ultimate expression of God’s “great love” for sinners (Romans 5:8); and in the cross, the power of God rescuing us from the curse of sin when Jesus “took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing” (Galatians 3:13).

Let’s walk with Jesus through the final hours of His passion in reverential awe at the amazing truth unfolding before our eyes. Through Christ’s disgrace, God poured out His grace on us, and in the blood that flowed from Immanuel’s veins, we are cleansed.



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Those Final, Dreadful Hours

Matthew 27:27–50



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prepare your heart to enter the somber scenes of Christ's suffering described in Matthew 27:27–50.

Father, I admit, the brutality of Christ's passion is hard to watch, and I long to turn away. Yet, on the cross of shame, Christ bore my shame, and through His death, I gain eternal life. Only You can turn a symbol of fear and abuse into a beacon of hope. Take me trembling to the cross and fill my heart with wonder, praise, and love for My Savior. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Convinced Jesus didn't deserve the death penalty, Pilate ordered Jesus flogged with the intention of releasing Him (Luke 23:16). Accounts of the whip's fury were well known, so Matthew spared his readers the gory description of a Roman scourging.² He simply stated that Pilate "ordered Jesus flogged" (Matthew 27:26). Then Pilate relented to the mob and "turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified" (27:26).



Observation: The Way to Golgotha and Death on the Cross

The Roman soldiers were barracked at Antonia Fortress, a large military complex on the northwest corner of the temple mount. From the towers on the four corners of the fort, sentries could keep watch over the temple area, standing ready to crush any insurrection.

Mocking and Abuse at the Antonia Fortress—Matthew 27:27–31

View the picture of a model of the Antonia Fortress on page 285 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, noting the size of the complex with its open courtyard. The governor's soldiers who brought Jesus to the fortress "called out the entire regiment," about 600 soldiers. They dragged Jesus into the courtyard as the soldiers stopped their morning routines to gawk sadistically at a Jew who claimed to be king.



Those Final, Dreadful Hours

Matthew 27:27–50

What did the soldiers do to Jesus, according to [Matthew 27:27–30](#)? Why do you think they abused Him in this way in front the entire regiment?

They cynically play-acted a coronation of Jesus, mocking Him and hitting Him repeatedly.³ It was as if each soldier was trying to top the other's joke and get a bigger cheer from the bloodthirsty spectators. Yet, Jesus bore it all with silent, patient dignity.

*He did not retaliate when he was insulted,
nor threaten revenge when he suffered.
He left his case in the hands of God,
who always judges fairly. (1 Peter 2:23)*

The Way of the Cross—Matthew 27:31–33

The soldiers then forced Jesus to carry the beam of His cross through the crowded streets of Jerusalem to the site of His execution. Exhausted from the flogging and multiple beatings, Jesus carried His cross for a while but must have fallen under the beam's weight at some point along the way. So what did the soldiers accompanying Jesus do, according to [Matthew 27:31–33](#)? Read page 286 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary for Simon's background and a description of the route.



Those Final, Dreadful Hours

Matthew 27:27–50

The Crucifixion at Calvary—Matthew 27:34–50

Jesus arrived at Golgotha, meaning “Place of the Skull” (Matthew 27:33)—or in Latin, *Calvarius*, from which we derive *Calvary*. After Jesus refused the “wine mixed with bitter gall,” an elixir meant to dull pain, the Roman soldiers “nailed him to the cross” (27:34–35).⁴ Again, Matthew respectfully refrains from describing the details; instead, he focuses on the action around Jesus after His cross was raised and set.

What did the soldiers do in [Matthew 27:35–36](#)?

For what crimes were the two men on either side of Jesus crucified, according to [27:38](#)?

In the following chart, write down the three groups that hurled insults at Jesus and the accusations they made.

Verses	Group	Accusations
Matthew 27:39–40		
Matthew 27:41–43		
Matthew 27:44		



Those Final, Dreadful Hours

Matthew 27:27–50

What similarities do you see in their accusations? Also, how do they echo Satan's temptations of Jesus in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:3, 6*)?

Eventually, the taunting voices went silent. Darkness smothered the light of the noon sun for three hours, and out of the darkness, Jesus' voice rang out. What words did the Son of God call out at the climax of His suffering (*27:45–46*)?

Those nearby mistook the word, *Eli*, for the name of the prophet, Elijah. One of them extended a sponge filled with "sour wine" to Jesus' lips to quench His parched throat, while the others gaped to see if Elijah would save Jesus (*27:47–49*). Little did they realize that *they were the ones needing saving*, and the One doing the saving was right before them taking His final breath: "Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit" (*27:50*).

In that brief period of time, Jesus bore your sins, my sins, the sins of the whole world.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Jesus' Cry of Dereliction

How should we interpret what theologians call Jesus' cry of *dereliction*, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (*Matthew 27:46*)? What took place in the darkness when Jesus voiced that lament from Psalm 22:1?



Those Final, Dreadful Hours

Matthew 27:27–50

For answers, read the following verses and summarize what happened in those moments: *Isaiah 53:6*; *Matthew 20:28*; *2 Corinthians 5:21*; and *Galatians 3:13*.

At Gethsemane, Jesus had vowed His willingness to drink the cup of God's wrath. Now, hanging on the cross, Jesus drained that awful cup to its dregs. Not a drop of judgment was left for us! "Now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1)!

Had it not been for what Jesus did for us on the cross, we would all perish in our sins. We would die doomed, and our world would be a dark world without hope. Is there a worse way to live than without hope? Thank God for His forgiveness! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Those Final, Dreadful Hours

Matthew 27:27–50



Correlation: Prophecy Fulfilled

Throughout his gospel, Matthew has consistently shown how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.⁵ What actions surrounding Jesus' crucifixion can you identify in the following prophetic passages?

Prophecy	Fulfillment in Jesus' Crucifixion
<i>Psalms 22:1–2</i>	
<i>Psalms 22:6–8</i>	
<i>Psalms 22:12–14</i>	
<i>Psalms 22:16–18</i>	
<i>Isaiah 53:3–5</i>	
<i>Isaiah 53:7</i>	
<i>Isaiah 53:12</i>	

Jesus' passion was finally over, and He could enter His rest. He had fulfilled His prophetic mission to bear our judgment and free us from sin's dreaded curse. In the next study, we'll witness the remarkable events that occurred in the aftermath. For now, let's linger at the cross as we offer our own sacrifice of praise for the sacrifice of our Savior.



Those Final, Dreadful Hours

Matthew 27:27–50



Application: Gratitude

In the following space, write a prayer of thanks to your heavenly Father for His Son and the price He paid for your salvation. What does Jesus' death mean to you?

Jesus' death was bittersweet—*bitter* as the cup of God's wrath He drank during His suffering and *sweet* as the forgiveness He offers all who believe. Praise God for the gift of eternal life made free to us through Christ Jesus our Lord!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, in the brutalities of the cross, I witness the shameful reality of my sin. Not just the sins of the Jewish authorities, Pilate, or the Roman soldiers but my own sins. I also see Your incomprehensible love. Your own Son died to give me eternal life. What gift can I give in return, poor as I am? Take my heart, my life, my all. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Cicero, as quoted by John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 24.
2. "A soldier tied [Jesus] to a low post and stripped off His outer garments. To inflict the most damage, the *lictor*—the one responsible for the scourging—would typically select a whip with small weights or bits of sheep bone braided into the straps. Because this kind of whip caused so much physical harm so quickly, the victim often passed out or went into shock within just a few lashes." Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 280.
3. "The scarlet robe (Gr. *chlamys*) they put on Jesus (v. 28) was probably the reddish purple cloak that Roman military and civil officials wore. Perhaps the thorny spikes that the soldiers wove into a circle to resemble the one on Tiberius Caesar's head on Roman coins consisted of palm branches. The imperfect tense of the Greek verb translated "beat" means they beat Jesus on the head repeatedly (cf. Isa. 52:14)." Thomas Constable, "Matthew 27:28–31," Constable's Notes, netbible.org.
4. In "Excursus: Crucifixion" on page 289 of his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes how the Romans crucified victims and includes an illustration of the type of cross on which Jesus died.
5. Previous examples of Jesus fulfilling prophecy include His virginal conception (Matthew 1:22–23), location of birth (2:5–6), flight to Egypt (2:15), escape of Herod's slaughter of the infants (2:17–18), announcement in the wilderness (3:3), ministry in Galilee (4:14–16), healing ministry (8:17), ministry to Gentiles (12:17–18), three-day entombment (12:39–40), speaking in parables (13:13–15), triumphal entry (21:3–5), and betrayal by Judas (27:8–10).



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY NINETEEN

... And Then, What Happened?

Matthew 27:51–66

The tearing of the veil of the Holy of Holies was an announcement: “No longer is there a barrier between sinners and their holy God.” We are now free to come through the open veil right into the presence of God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It is *finished!* (John 19:30). After Jesus said these words in His final moments on the cross, “he released his spirit” into the outstretched hands of His Father and died (Matthew 27:50). Christ’s suffering was finally over . . . but suffering wasn’t the only thing that was finished.

In those awful hours of darkness, God made His sinless Son “to be sin on our behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NASB). Jesus became our substitute when “the LORD laid on him the sins of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

Imagine that! The sum of all sins was accounted for at the cross, and Jesus bore them all—just as the writer to the Hebrews declared:

“With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever. . . . Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.” (Hebrews 9:12, 14)

Through His death, Jesus had accomplished the *work of salvation* that God had sent Him to do. ***It was finished!***

The impact of Christ’s accomplishment sent shockwaves through the land in the form of three supernatural phenomena occurring in rapid succession. What incredible events occurred after Jesus died? Let’s find out in this *Searching the Scriptures* study.



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... And Then, What Happened?

Matthew 27:51–66



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Through Christ, we can come directly into God's presence. As you open His Word, thank the Lord for the access we have in Christ and ask Him to open your eyes to the wonders of His grace.

Father, in the aftermath of Your Son's death, some life-changing, earth-shaking, events took place. Help me understand the meaning of these events and fill my heart with a deeper love and appreciation for Jesus who leads me into Your presence and makes me dwell in Your grace. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 27:50–66](#), you'll notice the setting begins in the place of Christ's crucifixion (Matthew 27:51–56) and shifts to the site of the tomb (27:57–66). The tomb was in a garden, perhaps a stone's throw away from the cross (John 19:41). In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll helps us imagine the garden scene.

We often picture the tomb of Jesus as out in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by a wooded area off the beaten path. Instead, we should picture a walled garden within sight of Golgotha itself, perhaps just across the street, with a door or gate and a staff of gardeners working inside.¹

Such a beautiful, serene location for Jesus' tomb. But before leading us into the garden where Jesus' body was laid to rest, Matthew's account carries at the foot of the cross.



Observation: Events Surrounding the Cross and the Tomb

Scripture comes to life when we can put ourselves into the scenes.² A shadow of death still shrouded the land in a kind of grief after Christ died. However, just as God's Spirit was hovering over the deep waters at creation to call forth new life, He was also moving in the darkness after Christ's death.



... And Then, What Happened?

Matthew 27:51–66

Events Surrounding the Cross—Matthew 27:51–56

What three supernatural events occurred the moment Christ died, according to [Matthew 27:50–53](#)?

In the interpretation phase, we'll explore the significance of the tearing of the veil, the earthquake, and the raised bodies. For now, according to [27:54–56](#), what life-changing impact did Christ's death have on the soldiers? Who witnessed the action from a distance?

How does the Roman soldiers' pronouncement about Jesus contrast with the Jewish leaders' charges in the mock trials and accusations ([Matthew 26:63–66](#); [27:41–43](#))? How does the Roman soldiers' statement reflect a central theme in Matthew's gospel?

The soldiers' confession still rings in the hearts of countless millions who have also experienced the Savior's power. Only one explanation makes sense: Jesus "truly was [and is] the Son of God!" (27:54).



... And Then, What Happened?

Matthew 27:51–66

Events Surrounding the Tomb—Matthew 27:57–66

What specifics does Matthew give regarding the *who*, *how*, *where*, and *when* of the removal and burial of Jesus' body, according to [Matthew 27:57–61](#)? Why do you think these details are important?

Joseph was an “honored member of the high council” (Mark 15:43) and “had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders” (Luke 23:51). The next day, other members of the Sanhedrin went to Pilate. How do their motives and actions contrast with Joseph's, according to [Matthew 27:62–66](#)?

They sealed the tomb, and they posted guards to protect it. Are you kidding? We're talking about a God who can create something out of nothing and the Lord who is able to do the impossible. They put a few puny guards at the entrance and a little wax on the stone, and they think that's going to keep Jesus in! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



... And Then, What Happened?

Matthew 27:51–66



Interpretation: Rending the Veil, Splitting the Rocks, and Raising the Dead

The tearing of the veil from top to bottom symbolized God opening access to His holy presence through the sacrificial death of His Son. This massive, inches-thick veil hung at the entrance to the Most Holy Place, the innermost sanctuary of the temple. At the time of Moses, around 1500 years earlier, a similar veil divided the tabernacle. What was hidden behind that veil, and what did it signify (*Exodus 25:22; 40:18–21*)?

Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place and only annually on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). On this day, the high priest atoned for the people's sins by sprinkling the blood of a sacrifice there.

How did Christ's death on the cross accomplish a similar work of atonement—only better? For help with the answer, read page 296 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*. For an online resource, consult *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.



... And Then, What Happened?

Matthew 27:51–66

The second sign was an earthquake that split apart rocks (Matthew 27:51). What do you think God was announcing about Himself and His Son's earthshaking accomplishment? [Isaiah 29:5–6](#) gives insight into the answer, and the soldiers model the appropriate response ([Matthew 27:54](#)).

Finally, as the earth shook, “tombs opened” and “the bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead” (Matthew 27:52). How do we understand this sign? Read pages 297–298 in Pastor Chuck's commentary to find two possible interpretations. Based on your research, what do you think happened and why?

You do not need anyone to represent you when you go before the Lord other than Jesus Himself. We go to God through Christ, and we go instantly, boldly, and frequently because—thanks to the torn veil—we now have an open relationship with God.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: A Heavenly Tabernacle and a Better Covenant

The writer to the Hebrews gives us a closer look behind the scenes of Christ's accomplishment. Christ's atonement not only gave us access to God, but it also ended the old sacrificial system, which was “only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1).



... And Then, What Happened?

Matthew 27:51–66

How was the offering of Christ better than the offerings made by the Jewish priests, according to *Hebrews 10:11–12*?

Through His once-for-all sacrifice, Christ cancelled “the first covenant in order to put the second into effect” (10:9). According to *10:15–18*, what amazing blessings do we enjoy under Christ’s new covenant?

How close is the Son of God to His Father? We are just as close in Christ. In the person of His Son—as we are when we come to Jesus as Savior—we are as near as the Son to the Father. The same access the Son has, we have. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Where Are We in the Scene?

Like the women present in the aftermath of Christ’s death, we’ve witnessed the miracles, the changed lives of the Roman soldiers, and the entombment of Jesus. What lessons do we learn?

First, *when we come to the end of all hope, remember what happened right after Jesus died.* In their hopelessness, most of Jesus’ disciples had left the site of Jesus’ death. But by leaving, they missed God’s power! When all seems lost, even when a loved one dies, remember God is still present. He is still working in our lives.

Second, *when you think that someone you love is too lost for God to save,* remember the Roman soldiers. If the Lord saved those hardened men’s souls, then He can reach your lost loved one too.



... And Then, What Happened?

Matthew 27:51–66

Third, *when anyone tries to hinder God's plan, remember the resurrection!* How futile it was for the authorities to seal the tomb and put a guard at the entrance. God can overcome any human barrier to accomplish His will.

Which of these principles can you apply most directly to your situation? What can you do right now in response?

In your mind's eye, walk again through the scenes of the aftermath of Jesus' death and burial. What other principle from the passage can you draw? How can this truth guide your way today?

The burial of Christ set the stage for the resurrection, the Sunday-morning miracle that changed everything. Death no longer has the last word; instead, life now has the final say! The darkness has passed, and light from Christ's dawn streaks across the horizon. In the next *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll step into that new day with our resurrected Lord.



... And Then, What Happened?

Matthew 27:51–66



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, before Christ died, all humanity sat under the ominous shadow of death. But then, Jesus bore sin's curse in His body on the cross, and now the light of a new day has dawned. Through Him, I come near to You. In Him, I live eternally in Your presence. With Him, I will walk through every trial in my life. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 302.
2. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY TWENTY

Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't?

Matthew 28:1–15

The angel moved back the stone not to let Jesus out but to let us in to see that the grave was empty. Jesus was not there!

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE tomb of Christ was in a private, peaceful garden, secluded from the noisy city outside its gate. Springtime flowers blossomed. Neatly tended beds burst with new life. Vines bearing their first-fruit buds stretched along trellises and climbed walls, casting the garden in a green, tranquil hue.

At the far end, the tomb was visible only by the round stone rolled in front of its entrance. On Friday, just before sundown, Joseph and Nicodemus encased the lifeless body of Jesus with linen cloth and sweet spices before laying Him to rest.

Jesus' tomb, however, was not a mere holding place for a decaying corpse. It was more like the fertile beds of the garden. Planted like a seed in the ground, Jesus' body would soon spring to life. Jesus' heavenly body would emerge, becoming the first fruit of "a great harvest of all who have died" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Let's join the women as they enter the garden on that first resurrection Sunday and discover, to their amazement, an empty tomb and, to our relief, real hope for our dying world.



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Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't?

Matthew 28:1–15



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Only Jesus can guide us through death into life. Open this *Searching the Scriptures* study by setting your hope solely on Him.

Father, please lift the shadows that creep over my spirit when I focus too much on the affairs of this life. Through Your Word, help me to see beyond the horizon of this earthly existence. Fill me with Your hope. Empower me to experience the life of Christ now as I await the glorification to come. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read [Matthew 28:1–15](#), notice how Matthew tells his readers *what happened* when the angel announced Christ is risen. Matthew also tells *what didn't happen*, specifically, Jesus' body was *not* stolen. This false story was circulating at the time, and Matthew's purpose was not only to record the truth, but also to debunk the lie.



Observation: The Miracle versus the Deception

To truly engage with this passage, we must use all our senses.¹ Feel the crispness in the early Sunday morning air. See the first rays of dawn spreading over the Mount of Olives. Sense the women's urgency as they hurry along the hilly route through the city. Smell the spices they carry to finish the job of anointing Jesus' body (Mark 16:1). Experience their shock when they arrive at the garden.

The Miracle of Resurrection—Matthew 28:1–10

What details do you observe in [Matthew 28:1–4](#)? The soldiers “fell into a dead faint” before the women arrived. What frightened them?



Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't?

Matthew 28:1–15

What did the angel say to the women, according to [Matthew 28:5–8](#)? Why do you think the angel rolled back the stone?

According to Pastor Chuck Swindoll's harmonization of the resurrection accounts, Mary Magdalene rushed off to tell John and Peter (John 20:1–2), while the other women went to find the rest of the disciples.² What happened along the way, according to [Matthew 28:9–10](#)?

The False Testimony from the Deceivers—Matthew 28:11–15

The women weren't the only witnesses of the events that morning. After reviving from their dead faint, some of the guards "went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened" (Matthew 28:11). Amazingly, the priests believed their story! A miracle had happened, but still they were determined to stand in God's way. What did the Jewish authorities do to discredit what they knew to be a supernatural event, according to [Matthew 28:12–15](#)?



Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't?

Matthew 28:1–15

The resurrection of Christ was so significant and miraculous that skeptics immediately planned a lie about it, and to this day, the lie is still being told. How much easier it is to believe a lie than to accept a miracle that you can't explain! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Skeptics' False Explanation

From the beginning, skeptics have tried to cast doubt on the biblical accounts of the resurrection, offering alternative theories to explain what happened to His body. In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll addresses the argument that the body was stolen and then gives reasons against it.

Read pages 316–317 of the commentary and in the space below summarize what you learn. Or, for an online rebuttal of the false theory, consult Matthew 28:12–14 of [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).

The “stolen body” theory just doesn't hold water. If the body was stolen, surely someone would have tracked it down and produced it, but no one ever has so the claim of the soldiers is empty.

In addition, the soldier's story that they fell asleep was ridiculous. How likely was it that *all* the soldiers fell asleep and *none* awakened at the sound of the disciples fumbling in the darkness? Besides, the disciples were defeated and scattered. None of them understood the meaning of the resurrection (John 20:9–10). How could this frightened bunch concoct such a bold plan so quickly? Furthermore, would they have later sacrificed their lives as martyrs for a cause they knew to be a lie? No way!

The angel's message is the only possible explanation for Jesus' missing body: *He is risen*.



Correlation: Our Hope Rests in a Living Savior

Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice on the cross set in place the cornerstones of Christianity, such as *redemption*, *justification*, and *forgiveness*. But without Jesus' resurrection, these stones would be buried under the tangled weeds of Joseph's lost garden.



Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't?

Matthew 28:1–15

According to Paul in [1 Corinthians 15:17–19](#), what would be our plight if Jesus had not been raised?

Thankfully, Christ is risen! His triumph over death gives us hope of our own resurrection. In [15:42–44](#), Paul contrasts our earthly bodies that die with our resurrected bodies. Read those verses in two Bible versions and use the following chart to list the contrasts.

Earthly Body	Resurrected Body

Our hope rests in a *living* Savior. According to [15:51–53](#), what will happen when He returns?

The resurrection of Christ is a message of hope. We must not think we just move into “nothingness” when we die. With Christ, we live on and on, just like Him.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't?

Matthew 28:1–15



Application: Which Story Do You Believe?

Skeptics find it easier to believe the stolen body theory rather than surrender their lives to a living Savior. To be certain, believing in the resurrection without seeing Jesus alive takes faith.

However, while believing without seeing calls upon a higher level of faith, it yields a greater spiritual blessing—just as Jesus declared when He appeared to Thomas:

“You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”
(John 20:29)

Are you going through a dark period of grief or loss that has cast a shadow across your spirit—just like the disciples after Jesus died? What is causing you to be discouraged?

What about Jesus' empty tomb and the angel's earth-shaking announcement revives your hope?

Perhaps the greatest blessing of the resurrection is the assurance that God has a future for us as well as His entire creation. Close this study by declaring with Paul your faith in Jesus whose resurrection guarantees your life beyond the grave.



Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't?

Matthew 28:1–15

Let me tell you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

Then when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, the Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:51–57)



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for raising Your Son from the dead and giving me hope beyond this life. I claim by faith the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus, my living Savior. He is risen! He is risen, indeed! In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)" at [insight.org](#).
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 312–313, 319. Read the entire harmonization of the resurrection accounts as it is presented in three parts. "Excursus: Resurrection Accounts Harmonized, Part 1—From Thursday to Saturday," 303–305. "Excursus: Resurrection Accounts Harmonized, Part 2—From Saturday Night to Sunday Morning," 311–313. "Excursus: Resurrection Accounts Harmonized, Part 3—Sunday and Beyond," 319.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

The plan Jesus set in motion before He ascended back into heaven is the only plan that will work.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As the end of the conference drew near, the decision makers discussed, “What now?” When William Carey realized they favored the wide road with a smooth path, he grabbed Andrew Fuller’s arm crying out, “Is nothing again going to be done?”

William Carey wanted a missionary society that supported international workers who would make disciples among people who had never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Eventually, his vision materialized and he became one of those workers—going to India. For more than forty years, without returning home, he translated the Bible, preached the gospel, and made disciples. We now know William Carey (1761–1834) as the father of modern missions.

The global vision that compelled Carey comes from the words Jesus spoke in Matthew 28:16–20. As Christians, we’re indebted to those who’ve proclaimed Jesus’ message before us, and we’re summoned by our Lord to continue in that worthy endeavor so others, too, may enjoy Christ.



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What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

It's always important to pray before reading God's Word. Since we'll focus on Jesus' global mission, read Psalm 67:2–3 below, and write it as a prayer in your own words while also requesting God's aid in this study.

*“May your ways be known throughout the earth,
your saving power among people everywhere.
May the nations praise you, O God.
Yes, may all the nations praise you.”*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The passage for our *Searching the Scriptures* study is known as the Great Commission—Jesus' marching orders for His followers. Jesus had risen from the dead, but would soon leave them to ascend into heaven. What were they to do next?

In the momentous words of the Great Commission, Jesus answered the “What now?” question all of His disciples must have been asking. His words still ring true today, giving us *the central plan* for carrying on Jesus' ministry until He returns.



Observation: The Great Commission

We begin with observing what the Bible says by reading it slowly and paying attention to the words.¹ Read [*Matthew 28:16–20*](#) and note questions you may have about the text or anything that stands out to you.



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

According to Matthew 28:17, the eleven disciples responded in what two ways to Jesus?

1. _____
2. _____

According to 28:18, how much authority has been given to Jesus?

According to 28:19, to what nations did Jesus send His disciples?

According to 28:20, which of Jesus' commands are His disciples to obey?

According to 28:20, how long will Jesus be with His people?

Did you catch the “therefore” in 28:19? In observation, we note the logical connection of statements—especially when we see connectives like “therefore.” So how does the “therefore” connect verse 28:19 with verse 28:18?

There's nothing following Jesus' words in Matthew's gospel. This is it. This is the plan. This is the Great Commission. Here are the instructions for all disciples who will follow Jesus after He has left the earth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20



Interpretation: Jesus' Plan to Reach All Nations

Observing the text helps us break it down into sections so that we can understand what it means. In the interpretation step, we want to see through the author's eyes to avoid imposing our own opinions into the author's meaning.

The Setting—Matthew 28:16–17

Begin by looking up *Galilee* (Matthew 28:16) in the maps section of your Bible or your Bible atlas. In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll suggests a possible site of “the mountain where Jesus told them to go” as Mount Arbel. This vantage point would have given the disciples a broad view of the Galilee region and the highways that linked Israel to the rest of the world.²

Why do you think Jesus wanted to meet His disciples there instead of Jerusalem?

Review the prophecy about Galilee at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in [Matthew 4:12–17](#). Do you see any interpretive connections between the launch of Jesus' ministry and His commissioning His disciples?

Imagine seeing the resurrected Jesus on that mountain in Galilee. His new, immortal body must have appeared awesome, and yet He still bore “the wounds in his hands and his side” (John 20:20). The disciples worshiped Him, but some doubted—perhaps fretting over how they could carry on without the Master. Jesus answered their doubts and settled their hearts with His specific and encouraging instructions.



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

The Great Commission—Matthew 28:18–20a

Jesus began with a declaration of His authority ([Matthew 28:18](#)), the same theme that Matthew had developed throughout his gospel (Matthew 7:29; 9:6; 16:1–4; 21:23–27). What earlier event in Matthew 28 proved Jesus' authority once and for all?

Rephrase in your own words Jesus' statement, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth." Doing this increases our understanding because we must know what the text means before we can restate it.

According to [Matthew 28:18–20](#), how do we make disciples and what does a disciple do? Note the central verb, *make disciples*, and the other action words that complement it. For help identifying the verbs, read pages 322–323 of Pastor Chuck's commentary.



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

The Divine Assurance—Matthew 28:20b

How does Jesus' assurance in [Matthew 28:20](#) encourage His disciples and empower them to carry out His command to make disciples?

Just think—the God of the universe cares about us, gives us purpose in life, reveals to us His plan for the world, and equips us with His presence to do what He commands!

Jesus said in so many words, “I will give all the strength you need, provide all of the energy necessary, open all the doors that need to be opened, and when I do, walk through them. Open your heart, open your doors, open your life.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

In the upper room before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come. According to [John 16:8, 13–15](#), what did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would do to aid His disciples in their mission?



What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

Right before Jesus ascended into heaven, He met His disciples one last time. The setting for this encounter was the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem, and Jesus had a final word of instruction for them. According to [Acts 1:8](#), what did Jesus say about the source of their power, the job they were to do, and where they were to go?

Insight for Living Ministries has [Vision 195](#) as part of our marching orders. It's our vision to go to all 195 countries of the world with the message of Christ!
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Great Commission, Our Mission

What principles can we apply from Christ's Great Commission? At least four streams of application flow from His powerful words.

First, *Jesus spoke to very ordinary people who knew Him personally*. No super-spiritual saints were in the group of people who received the Great Commission! They were people just like us.

Second, *Jesus presented a plan that was brief, simple, and clear*. Anyone can grasp the action points—*make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching*. His plan is doable because we operate under His authority and in His power, not our own.

Third, *Jesus was intense about the mission but relaxed regarding the method*. Jesus used the word *all* to communicate His passion: “all authority,” “all the nations,” “all the commands I have given you” (Matthew 28:18–20). We must be all-in regarding His mission, but remember, Jesus never gave us a specific method. We can be flexible to adapt our ministries to be as effective as possible.

Fourth, *Jesus expected obedient action from all His followers*. Each follower of Christ *can* participate in the Great Commission, and we *should*. Making disciples is not an option.



THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

What Now?

Matthew 28:16–20

As you conclude this study, pray for clarity and wisdom about how God would have you move forward in a new way in His Great Commission. If He's made it clear, then pray for courage to do what He's revealed. Write down the one thing you know to do this week to further His plan.

God will always guide you as you find new ways to share the glorious news of His Son, Jesus. May God give you opportunities to speak about His mysterious, glorious plan of Christ to those who desperately need good news.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I give You my heart, hands, and feet in Your Son's service. Give wings to the words of the gospel as I proclaim them to others. Motivate me to find new ways to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission. Thank You for the reassurance of Your Son's abiding presence and the Spirit's energizing power to make Your kingdom a reality on earth. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](https://www.insight.org/how-to-study-the-bible-for-yourself)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 320–21.



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8

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

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

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

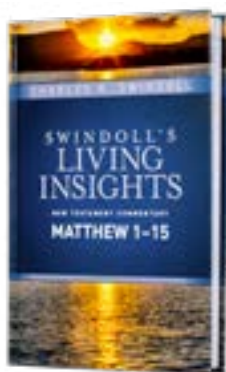
STUDY

What Now?

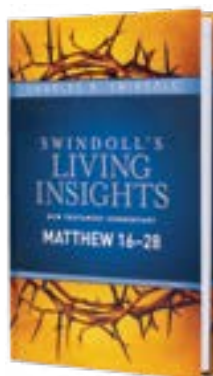
Matthew 28:16–20



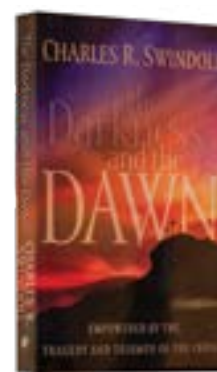
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For the 2021 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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