



IT'S THE
END
OF THE
WORLD
AS WE KNOW IT

an **honest** look
at Matthew 24

THE TOPIC

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount of Olives "The Olivet Discourse"

THE SCRIPTURE

Matthew 24-25 (also Mark 13: 1-37 and Luke 21:5-36)

THE QUESTIONS

What is the prophecy? What is the purpose of prophecy? How should we approach prophecy today? How do we interpret prophetic passages?

SOME THOUGHTS

Prophecy is sometimes **foretelling**, telling in advance, predicting future events.

Example: Isaiah 7:13-8:4 The immediate fulfillment was the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. The ultimate fulfillment was the birth of the Jesus the Messiah.

The concept of multiple fulfillment: Biblical prophecies may refer to an immediate fulfillment and also foreshadow another, later event.

Prophecy is often "**forthtelling**;" declaring God's thoughts, feelings and reaction to His people's behavior, choices, etc. Example: Jeremiah 8:4-22; notice especially verses 5-6, 8-12.

FOUR VIEWS (INTERPRETIVE PARADIGMS) OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY

Preterism: most or all of the biblical prophecies concerning the end times refer to events that happened in the first century following Jesus' death and resurrection.

Proponents of this view include R. T. France and N. T. Wright.

Idealism: (also known as the spiritual or allegorical) view of biblical prophecies, including Matthew 24 and the Book of Revelation, which emphasizes the symbolism of the images. These images (e.g. stars falling from the sky, the Beast in Revelation) do not necessarily refer to historical figures or events, but are related to spiritual principles.

Historicism: prophetic passages including Matthew 24, Daniel, and Revelation are understood as being fulfilled in a continuous historical timeline from ancient Jewish history through the End of the Age, or are understood as repetitive historical cycles.

This view was dominant in the Protestant Reformation and included proponents such as John Calvin, George Whitefield, C. H. Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, Martin Luther and John Wesley.

It's the End of the World As We Know It?

Futurism: interprets most biblical prophecies, including the Book of Revelation, Daniel, Matthew 24 as generally in the future as literal, physical, apocalyptic and global.

To counter the Protestant Reformation interpretation of historicism, which understood the Roman Catholic Church as the Beast of Revelation and the Pope as the antichrist, Roman Catholic Jesuit Francisco Ribera created the futurist interpretation of Bible prophecy.

Proponents include Gleason Archer, Donald Barnhouse, Martin De Haan, Arno Clemens Gaebelein, Norman Geisler, Harry A. Ironside, Walter Kaiser, Jr., Hal Lindsey, Ernst Lohmeyer, John F. MacArthur, J. Vernon McGee, Henry M. Morris, J. Dwight Pentecost, John Bertram Phillips, Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Merrill Tenney, John Walvoord, and Warren W. Wiersbe

FUTURIST INTERPRETATION IN THE HEADLINES

Harold Camping, a bible teacher and owner of Family Radio, has publically stated that, based on his biblical interpretation and calculations, the Judgment Day will be May 21, 2011.

Hal Lindsey (author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 1970) predicted the world would end in 1988 since that was 40 years since the birth of modern Israel.

And one of the more famous "prophecies" was **88 reasons the Rapture would be in 1988**: (from www.isitso.org/guide/whise.html)

Edgar Whisenant had been an unknown Bible student until 1988, when he wrote and distributed two books, titled *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988* and *On Borrowed Time*. Their message was that the Rapture of the Church was to occur on the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hoshana, in 1988, sometime between Sept. 11 and Sept. 13. The 88 "proofs" of this were based on a collection of dates and calculations from Biblical and historical factors.

Whisenant had no doubts about his date, stating: "Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong; and I say that to every preacher in town." During one interview he made a declaration that dramatically demonstrated his level of confidence: "[I]f there were a king in this country and I could gamble with my life, I would stake my life on Rosh Hashana 88." (ETV p. 93)

Although many religious leaders in the US discounted Whisenant's predictions, quite a few got on his bandwagon, including Paul and Jan Crouch, and their Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN) ministry.

They went so far as to alter regular programming on September 11-13. Instead of airing their nightly Praise the Lord television talk show, they ran videotapes of prerecorded shows dealing with the rapture. For non-Christians who might be watching, the revised programming included specific instructions on what to do in case Christian family members or friends disappeared and the world was thrust into the tribulation. (ETV p. 93)

It's the End of the World As We Know It?

300,000 copies of 88 Reasons were mailed free of charge to ministers across America, and 4.5 million copies were sold in bookstores and elsewhere.

When nothing happened by the end of September 13, Whisenant revised his prediction, suggesting the rapture would come at 10:55 AM on September 15. When that failed, he revised it to October 3.

Even when that date passed, Whisenant remained undaunted: "The evidence is all over the place that it is going to be in a few weeks anyway," he told Christianity Today.

After his "few weeks" had transpired, Whisenant finally saw his error. He claimed that he had made a slight miscalculation of one year because of a fluke in the Gregorian calendar. Jesus was actually going to return during Rosh Hashanah of 1989! Whisenant published his discovery in The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1989. "The time is short," he said. "Everything points to it." This publication was subsequently retitled The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1990 and has since been re-titled yearly as The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 and so on. He continue[d] to revise his date annually. (ETV p. 94)

It would appear that Whisenant finally gave up. No Whisenant website exists, and he and his 88 Reasons have now entered the lore of false prophecies of the 20th century.

GETTING OUR BEARINGS

SETTING

The Gospel of Matthew was written to...

To whom is Jesus speaking in chapter 24? Where is Jesus, physically, as he is speaking? Where was he immediately before this?

CONTEXT

What is the context of Olivet Discourse?

How does Matt. 24 relate to Matt. 23? How is chapter 24 related to chapter 25? What question(s) is Jesus answering in 24:4-51?

What are the major sections of the chapter and how are they related?

Why would some interpreters see verses 4-28 as a unit and others see vv. 4-35 as a unit? What difference does it make? What do you think?

What is the main point of verses 29-31? When does this occur?

Is Jesus referring to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, the end of the age (immediately before His second coming), or a combination of the two?

It's the End of the World As We Know It?

In your discussion of the flow and meaning of the text in answer to the questions above, consider Craig Keener's helpful outline of different explanations offered by Bible scholars (Matthew, IVP: 1997, p. 349):

"In Matthew, the tribulation (distress) seems to begin with the sanctuary's desecration in 66 and concludes with Jesus' return (24:29). If this observation is correct, it requires a "tribulation" longer than three and a half years or some other way to bridge the gap between 66 and the end.

Scholars offer several explanations for this gap: In Matthew 24 Jesus...

(1) skips from this tribulation to the next eschatologically significant event, his return (compare Lk 21:24);

(2) regards the whole interim between the temple's demise and his return as an extended tribulation period ("immediately"—Mt. 24:29);

(3) prophetically blends the tribulation of 66-70 with the final one, which prefigures it;

(4) begins the tribulation in 66 but postpones the rest of it until the end time;

*(5) intends his "return" in verses 29-31 symbolically for the fall of Jerusalem...
Not all of these views are mutually exclusive."*

THINK ABOUT IT!

Based on this passage, what is the "end time" according to Jesus?

How many times does he tell his disciples not to be "deceived" (don't believe it) in Matthew 24?

Which verses? Why did Jesus say that?

What are we not to be deceived about? By whom are we not to be deceived?

Are there any "signs" of Jesus' second coming? What are they?

Will his coming be "secret" (known only by some) or will it be public? Why?

Based on this passage, who knows when Jesus will return?

What are Jesus' followers to do while they await his return?

What will that waiting period be like? Why does Jesus compare it to the "days of Noah"?

It's the End of the World As We Know It?

Look at Genesis 6:5 and 7:6-23. Notice the end of verse 23. Who was “left” after the flood (the judgment of God on the wicked)?

Now look at Matt. 24:36-41. In the context of Noah in Genesis, how do you interpret verses 40-41?

In verse 42, what does it mean to “keep watch?” Does it mean to “look for” and “anticipate immediately” or does it mean “stay awake, be alert, and ‘on duty’”?

Is Jesus being compared to a thief in v. 43? What is the point of vv. 43-44? What evidence do you use to support your answer?

What does it mean for Christians living in 2011 to “be ready?” What does being ready look like in the church? In your personal life? In your family?

Why did Jesus tell his disciples all this? What was Jesus’ concern and motive?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

N. T. Wright, **Matthew for Everyone, Part Two** (chapters 16-28), Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Craig Keener, **Matthew** (IVP New Testament Commentary Series), Inter-Varsity Press, 1997.

Biblical Eschatology blog, part of the ministry of the Francis Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development: Contains thoughtful and often helpful discussions of end times topics, such as eschatology (theology of end times), tribulation, rapture, as well as commentary and analysis of biblical texts such as Matthew 24, Revelation, and other prophetic passages.

<http://biblicaleschatology.org/eschatology/>

Enjoying God Ministries, Dr. Sam Storms: Very helpful irenic discussions of key passages which interact with multiple perspectives.

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/studies/eschatology/>