

## Matthew 24D

- As we continue our study of Matthew 24 and the Olivet Discourse, we've reached a particularly fascinating and challenging passage today
  - Let's begin by remembering our outline based on the questions Jesus was asked by His disciples
  - First, Jesus' disciples asked Him to explain three things: His prediction of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem
    - Then Jesus explained how the Romans would destroy the temple in a future day
    - And as we learned, history played out exactly as Jesus said it would
  - Secondly, what signs would God send to announce the end of the age was drawing near
    - And Jesus told us to expect increasing earthquakes, famines, plagues and world wars
    - And we saw clear evidence that these signs have already begun to happen, meaning the end of our age is upon us
  - And thirdly, they asked Jesus what would be the signs to the world that Jesus was entering into His Kingdom
    - This answer is by far the longest one of the group, so last week we only studied the first part of Jesus' response
    - In vs.9-14 Jesus gave us six signs that will precede His coming into His kingdom
    - The signs included false prophets deceiving the world, lawlessness, love growing cold, and others
  - We learned last week that these signs were all features of a unique seven-year period the Bible calls Tribulation
    - The book of Daniel tells us that the seven years of Tribulation are the final years of this age immediately prior to Jesus' return
    - So only those who live during those final seven years of Tribulation will experience the signs of Jesus' coming

- But the signs that announce the end of the age start centuries before the end and build over time
  - And we've already begun to see the signs that announce the end of the age
  - So the signs of the end of the age are for everyone to witness, and the signs of Jesus' coming will be for those of Tribulation to see
- And as we ended last week, I told you the Church will not witness the signs of Jesus' Second Coming because we accompany Jesus at His return
  - In fact, we don't need to witness signs announcing an event that we take part in personally
    - There are other clues in this text telling us that the Church is not intended to witness the signs of Jesus' return
    - For example, earlier Jesus told us many would come in His name saying they are the Christ, yet that won't mean the end is near
  - But then later in v.11 Jesus said that one of the signs of His coming would be false prophets deceiving many
    - How can false prophets not be a sign but at the same time it will be a sign?
    - This isn't a contradiction...Jesus is saying that false prophets aren't a sign to the Church but they will be a sign to the world
  - For as long as the Church is on earth, false prophets will exist because the enemy is always seeking to stumble believers with false teaching
    - But once the Church is no longer on earth, the enemy will begin targeting the unbelieving world with these false prophets
    - With the Church out of the way, the enemy will be free to deceive the world, and that worldwide deception will be a sign
    - So what was not a sign while the Church was present will become a sign after the Church has departed
    - Later in this chapter we will see specifically how and why the church is not present to witness signs of Jesus' return
- But for now we move ahead with the rest of the signs of Jesus' return, and these signs become increasingly intense as Tribulation moves toward its end

[Matt. 24:15](#) “Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

[Matt. 24:16](#) then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

[Matt. 24:17](#) “Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house.

[Matt. 24:18](#) “Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.

[Matt. 24:19](#) “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

[Matt. 24:20](#) “But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.

[Matt. 24:21](#) “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

[Matt. 24:22](#) “Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

[Matt. 24:23](#) “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him.

[Matt. 24:24](#) “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

[Matt. 24:25](#) “Behold, I have told you in advance.

[Matt. 24:26](#) “So if they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them.

- As we dive into this passage, remember that Jesus is answering Question #2 (but the fourth one addressed): what are the signs of His coming into His Kingdom
  - And all these signs occur during the seven-year Tribulation, and we’ll see further proof of that here starting in v.15
    - Jesus gives us an important and specific sign of the abomination of desolation written about by Daniel the prophet
    - We know from Daniel that this moment takes place in the very middle of the seven years of Tribulation
  - Daniel describes it cryptically this way:

[Dan. 9:27](#) “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing

of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

- Daniel 9:27 tells us about this important moment during the seven year Tribulation called the abomination
  - Daniel tells us this event happens in the middle of a “week” which refers to the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation
  - A week is the Hebrew way of saying a seven-year period
  - In the middle of that seven-year period, Daniel says a man will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering
- Sacrifices and grain offerings only happen in a Jewish temple, so Daniel is describing an event in a future Jewish temple
  - So a man will put an end to the temple’s operation by causing an abomination that makes the temple desolate and unusable
  - Daniel doesn’t tell us what the man’s desecrating act will be, but the prophet says this abomination only remains for a while
  - He says the one who desecrated the temple will himself be destroyed, and then the abomination he committed will end too
- Back to Matthew, Jesus says when this man desecrates the temple, it will be a major sign to those on earth that Jesus’ coming is fast approaching
  - Since this event happens in the middle of the seven years, it means Jesus’ return is only 3.5 years after this event
- But more than that, Jesus says this event will be a turning point in those seven years, leading to a great upheaval unlike anything before it
  - In v.16 Jesus says this event should be a trigger for all who know Jesus to leave the city immediately
    - In fact, their flight must be so quick that it requires a complete abandonment of everything they value
    - In vs.17-20 Jesus describes an escape that is so urgent that there won’t be time enough to claim your coat from the closet
    - Wherever a person is standing at the instant the temple is desecrated, he or she must turn and run to the mountains

- And to emphasize the dire nature of that moment, Jesus says pregnant and nursing women will be especially handicapped
  - When a woman is in the later stages of pregnancy or is caring for an infant, she is weighed down and less mobile
  - Apparently, this escape is so urgent that carrying the added weight of an infant may be the difference between life and death
  - Likewise, escaping in winter or on a Sabbath when facilities and transportation services are closed can make this journey harder
- So Jesus tells those who must endure that day to pray for God to time these events outside winter and not on a Sabbath
  - The reference to a Sabbath is an important clue, because it tells us that the believers of this future day may be largely Jewish
  - Because only Jews would pay attention to the Sabbath day
  - So Jesus is describing an escaping of Jewish believers as if running from a tsunami or a landslide...every second counts
- Why will this desolation in the Jewish temple prompt such panic among believers?
  - Because what follows for mankind on earth is a terrifying mix of God's judgment and intense persecution
    - Jesus says in v.21 that the abomination will trigger a great tribulation such as has never been seen on earth before or after
    - The greatest wrath and destruction that God could possibly pour out on earth will be poured out in this final 3.5 years
    - And on top of that, the enemy of God will become especially active in persecuting believers on earth during this time
  - In fact, Jesus says in v.22 that had the Lord not set a time limit for this period of history, it would have meant total annihilation of mankind
    - We know Tribulation is only seven years, and Jesus says the great tribulation will be limited to the final 3.5 years of that time
    - And the destruction in that short time will be so great that had these time limits not existed, all life on earth would end

- We know from Revelation that these judgments result in the loss of all fresh water on earth and of all vegetation, etc.
  - Obviously, life on earth couldn't last long without water
  - That's how great and terrible this time of tribulation will be, and this time of terror will be a sign of Jesus' impending return
- Then Jesus says in v.24 that false Christs and false prophets will rise up to give the people hope
  - Because the world is reeling from disaster and intense persecution, it will have tremendous interest in a savior
  - So Satan will empower false prophets with supernatural power to mislead these desperate people on earth
  - In fact, Jesus says that the enemy will have hopes to mislead even the elect, those who have come to true faith in Jesus
- But then Jesus speaks to the believers of that future day saying don't believe the reports of these false prophets speaking of My return
  - When they tell you I'm in the wilderness or inside inner rooms (meaning in the temple holy place), don't believe these reports
  - They will be lies, and the believer can avoid being deceived if he or she listens to the word of God given here
  - So the calamities of Tribulation will be a sign of Jesus' return, but Jesus does not rely on false prophets to announce the moment
- I love this passage of the Bible for the way it reinforces the power of God to work through His word, and you see that power on display here
  - Jesus spoke these words 2,000 years ago to a handful of men sitting on a hillside in Israel
    - He warned them about events in the distant future telling them them not to be deceived
    - But these events did not come to pass in the lifetime of these men, and in fact they still haven't come to pass
    - Moreover, it's likely these men didn't even understand the warnings they were being given by Jesus

- And as far as we know, no one present at this moment with Jesus was even taking notes
- And yet Jesus issued His warnings fully confident that in a future day, His followers would have these words available and read them
  - In fact, Jesus was so confident in the staying power of His word that He even refers to Daniel, a book written 600 years earlier
  - So if you question the accuracy of the word of God or the Lord's ability to preserve it through history, consider Jesus' perspective
- Jesus clearly believed that what He spoke on that day on that hillside would be remembered, recorded, preserved and shared
  - And He expected that the prior works of Scripture like Daniel would also be preserved and shared over thousands of years
  - And that when the day came for these events to transpire, the word of God would be available to those who needed it
- And then as a future generation experiences the trials of Tribulation and turns to the word of God for counsel, they will find these instructions
  - Notice in v.15 Jesus adds a quick parenthetical comment saying let the reader understand
  - We could translate that phrase "reader understand" as if Jesus were commanding His followers to do their homework
- And later in v.25 Jesus tells those future disciples "behold, I've told you in advance"
  - In other words, Jesus is saying don't say I didn't tell you...all you have to do is read my words and you will have what you need
  - Jesus knew His word would be preserved and available to those who needed it in that day to come
  - And that's not just true of distant prophecy...that's true for everything found in the Bible
- So often as a pastor I minister to believers confronted with difficult challenges in their lives, usually as a result of sinful choices they made or others made
  - These challenges are the painful lessons in life that we all know and experience from time to time because of sin

- None of us live perfect lives, so we all suffer from time to time as a result of the decisions we make or others make
- And when these difficulties happen, we reach out for help and advice, and that's where a pastor often gets called in
- And in the course of giving the person counsel, I will take them to the Scriptures to show them what the Lord has to say
  - And so often, the answer we find in the Bible is some warning or exhortation that was ignored in the beginning
  - The Bible is saying don't say I didn't warn you, but we often ignore the warnings until it's too late
- That's the key to understanding and obeying the word of God...it's not a book of solutions for those who get into trouble
  - It's a manual for living designed to lead us away from trouble
  - We are supposed to study it and obey it so that it goes well with us

**Deut. 4:40** "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time."

- But if someone is to obey the word of God, including heeding the signs Jesus gives here, we must be students of Scripture...of all Scripture
  - In this case, we must study the book of Daniel, since that's where the abomination is described and the timeline is given
  - And then we bring that understanding to Jesus' words here so we may know and obey the signs Jesus gives
- As Jesus says, reader understand...do your homework, pay close attention to the Scriptures for your own sake
  - And that's true for New Testament epistles where Paul or Peter says do this or don't do that, etc...
  - It's also true for prophecies in both the Old and New Testament, even for those who may not live through the events
  - If nothing else, you may be part of the chain of custody that the Lord uses to deliver His word to the next generation of believers

- In this we find a fourth reason to study prophecy...to become a better Bible student and more obedient Christian
  - As we've studied this passage, we've come upon reasons why the study of prophecy is important
    - We learned that the study of prophecy helps knit the body of Christ together in a common understanding of our shared future
    - Secondly, it brings us hope and comfort in the midst of a chaotic, evil world by focusing our attention on our future eternal glory
    - Thirdly, it prepares for coming difficulties so we respond in the right way, either to escape or face them with our witness intact
  - And now, fourthly, we study prophecy because it's part of the Bible, and we are called to understand everything in the Bible
    - And if you are going to fully understand and obey what's in the Bible, you must study all of the Bible
    - And self-evidently, Jesus expects His disciples to read, understand and pass on what He gave us as part of our mission
  - But if we skip large sections of God's word because someone told us "you don't need to know prophecy...it's a distraction," we are wrong
    - We are proving ourselves to be poor students of Scripture, and therefore we are poor disciples of Jesus
    - We cannot obey what we do not understand, and we cannot teach what we ourselves have not studied
  - That's what discipleship is all about...reading and heeding, knowing and going, just as Jesus told us to do:

**[Matt. 28:19](#)** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

**[Matt. 28:20](#)** teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- We have been directly called by our Lord to teach future disciples to observe all that Jesus commanded His first disciples
- And included in the things Jesus commanded us to know and teach are instructions like this one...prophecies of the very end

- And when we devote ourselves to understanding prophecy, our obedience brings its own reward apart from whatever we might learn
  - There is a specific blessing promised to those who read and heed the book of Revelation, for example

**Rev. 1:3** Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

- And there is a general blessing to those who bring the word of God to others, especially the good news of Jesus' arrival

**Is. 52:7** How lovely on the mountains

Are the feet of him who brings good news,  
Who announces peace  
And brings good news of happiness,  
Who announces salvation,  
And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

- So now, let's do that...let's move ahead in understanding the rest of Jesus' (fourth) answer, to the (second) question on signs of His Second Coming

**Matt. 24:29** "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

**Matt. 24:30** "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

**Matt. 24:31** "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

- We're still looking at signs of Jesus' coming, and as we've already learned, these signs take place entirely within the seven years of Tribulation on earth
  - So far Jesus has given signs that happen in the earliest period of Tribulation like lawlessness and love growing cold
    - Then He moved to the events at the midpoint of Tribulation like the abomination in the temple and the great judgments of God

- And now Jesus moves to the very end of the seven years, to the very last days when Jesus' return is only hours away
- And at that time, the signs will become undeniable and unescapable, as the very heavens themselves are made to disappear
  - In v.29 Jesus says that the sun will stop shining, and of course as a result the moon will also go dark
  - Beyond our solar system, the stars in the universe will "fall" meaning they will no longer be visible either
- Obviously, the sun provides us daylight, but at night we keep our world lit with technology
  - Our houses remain lit and our streets and businesses are illuminated, so we tend to take light for granted
  - But we know that after seven years of disaster after disaster, the world will no longer be industrialized
  - There will be no electrical grid or infrastructure...we will have been reduced to the most rudimentary living
  - The book of Revelation and elsewhere described men living in caves and under rocks by this time
- So the only light the world has at the end of Tribulation is the light produced by the sun in the day and the moon and stars by night
  - But then there comes a moment when all light sources cease, and the world will be plunged into utter and complete darkness
  - This is a darkness that few of us have ever known unless you have gone into an underground cave or sealed room
  - When you are in a cave or closet, you expect total darkness, but when you are standing outside, it's a different experience
- Then out of this intense darkness, the world receives one final sign of Jesus' coming as a bright sign appears in the sky
  - The Lord turned off all the lights in the Universe so that His light would be the only thing visible
    - And out of this intense darkness, the world witnesses the return of Jesus and the Church and the angels following Him

- But notice Jesus says that His arrival leads the tribes of the earth to mourn as they see Jesus coming in power and glory
- Jesus uses the odd term “tribes of the earth” to contrast with the tribes of Israel
  - The tribes of Israel will not be mourning this moment, because they will be celebrating their Lord’s return
  - As we learned earlier, the Jew who endures to the end of Tribulation will be saved, Jesus said
- But the tribes of the earth, meaning all unbelieving Gentiles, will not be celebrating because the Lord’s return brings their judgment
  - We will study that judgment more later in this discourse
  - But for now we only need to note that Jesus’ return brings different things to different groups of people
  - To Jews, the Lord brings faith and redemption, and along with the believing Gentiles, He delivers the promised Kingdom
  - But to the unbelieving Gentiles on earth, the Lord brings judgment
- And then as a final sign to those waiting for Jesus on earth, the Lord says there will be a great gathering accomplished by angels
  - The Lord will send angels to gather the elect, all Jews wherever they may be left in that day, and assemble them in Jerusalem
    - This is necessary because the Old Testament promises that all Jews will be assembled in the Promised Land for the Kingdom
    - And the Old Testament also promises Israel that at the moment of this gathering for the Kingdom, a great trumpet will be blown

[Is. 27:12](#) In that day the LORD will start His threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel.

[Is. 27:13](#) It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

- Notice Isaiah says the Lord will be engaged in a time of great threshing, which is a metaphor for the judgment of tribulation
  - And at that time, the Lord will gather Israel from where they may be scattered to the holy mountain in Jerusalem
  - And as that gathering takes place, a great trumpet will be blown, and that's the trumpet Jesus is describing in v.31 of Matthew
- So putting all of this together, in answer to the question what are the signs of Jesus coming, we have this list:
  - The onset of Tribulation will be the overarching sign of Jesus' impending return
  - Specifically, there will be persecution of believers leading some to stumble and hate one another
  - There will be lawlessness, false prophets, a lack of love and yet a worldwide evangelistic effort
- Then in the middle of the seven years, a man desecrates the Jewish temple, leading to intense supernatural judgments and even greater persecution
  - Believers will flee to the mountains as the world undergoes upheaval
  - False prophets led by Satan will deceive the world and even attempt to deceive believers into following the wrong Christ
- Finally, at the end of the seven years, the heavens fall away, all light is gone and the world witnesses a bright light in the sky as Jesus returns
  - The elect will be assembled by angels and a great trumpet will sound to announce the arrival of Messiah and His Kingdom
    - And the unsaved on earth will be mourning their fate as they witness Jesus coming in glory
    - These are signs to the world that Jesus is coming, and as you reflect on that list, one thing becomes clear
  - There will be nothing subtle about the signs of Jesus' return...
    - It's almost comical to call these events signs, because they will be so utterly obvious to everyone

- It's like calling labor pains a sign to a woman that she is pregnant
- The point is that the Lord does not intend for anyone to miss His Son's coming into His Kingdom
  - Many missed His first coming in the day it happened, and in the centuries that have followed many more have ignored the news
  - Today, many are living as if there is no God and there will be no judgment despite the evidence to the contrary in the word of God
  - And for now, the Lord is content to allow that ignorance and defiance to continue
- But a day is coming – and the signs tell us that day is drawing close – when every knee will bow and every tongue confess
  - It will not be possible to ignore the signs of Jesus' Second Coming or to deny the event
  - You will either be with Jesus at His coming or you will mourn His arrival as you witnesses it from earth
  - If you place your faith in Jesus Christ now, while the window of opportunity is still available, then you can be part of His return
- But if you reject Him now, you will see Him face to face one day, and in that day the Bible says you will mourn His appearing
  - I urge you not to remain defiant in the face of the Bible's testimony and not to ignore the signs we have already seen
  - Join us in believing in the testimony of the Scriptures by placing faith in Jesus, trusting in His finished work on the cross to pay for your sins
- With that we have completed our study of Jesus' answers to all the questions He was asked by His disciples on the Mt. of Olives
  - But there was one more important event that takes place as part of the events that end the age which Jesus must explain to these men
    - The disciples never asked Jesus to explain this event, because none of them had ever heard of it before
    - This moment is pictured in numerous places in the Old Testament but it is never discussed plainly

- The disciples had no idea it was part of God's plan, yet as Jesus will show, it is the most important thing every believer must know
- I've said several times that we who believe will not be present to see the events Jesus describes at the end of the age
  - And next week Jesus will explain why that is so, as He tells His disciples about a great mystery God has planned for His Church