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# LIFE BIBLE STUDY

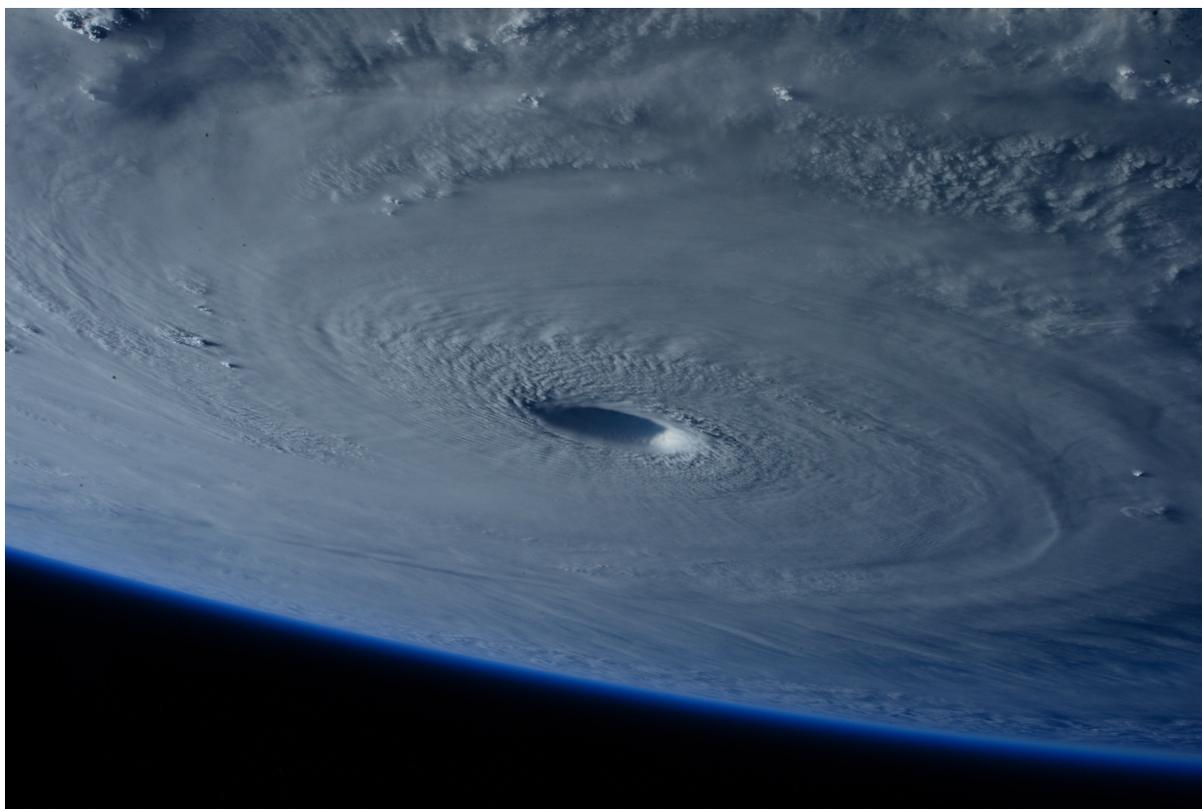
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**SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 24:1-25:46**

To understand the prophetic indicators of Jesus' Second Coming, and learn some simple lessons from parables.

## Ready, Set, Wait!

Growing up in Texas, we experienced Tornado Warnings on an annual basis multiple times a year. They don't even phase me now. My kids, of course, get scared, but they too one day will likely be a bit more normalized to the nearly predictable (and chaotic) Texas Spring weather. I have a friend, however, that grew up in Florida.



Florida doesn't experience tornadoes like we do. Instead, they deal with hurricanes. The differences between the two are interesting. Both are destructive and lethal, and yet, they form very differently. During tornado season, technological advancements have been made to finally allow us enough time to adequately prepare (read: get in a hallway or bathtub with a mattress). For so long, tornadoes were not easily predictable and the suddenness of them rendered them especially deadly. When a tornado siren goes off it's like someone yelling, "Ready! Set! Go!" Hurricanes, on the other hand, take time to form. The signs of hurricanes become clear, usually, well before the hurricane hits. People are able to make plans, grab their belongings, and often evacuate before the storm approaches. When the hurricane warnings begin, it's more like someone yelling, "Ready! Set! Wait!"

In Matthew 24, Jesus talks extensively about His coming for judgment, and his coming is more like a hurricane than a tornado. There will be many signs that will indicate to us that He and His imminent judgment are coming, as indicated by the parable of the fig tree in Matthew 24:32-35. For that reason, Jesus warns us in Matthew 24:44: “You also must be ready.”

## The Coming End

After Jesus’ startling statement regarding the razing of the Temple and other ancient architectural wonders, the disciples come to Jesus and ask Him when those things will take place. Jesus begins a rather long description of some of the things that will happen prior to the end of things, Jesus’ second coming, and the final judgment.

### *FALSE MESSIAHS (V.5)*

Jesus tells His disciples that some will rise up claiming to be the Messiah, but to not follow Him. In the immediate time following the resurrection of Jesus, other known individuals did claim to be the Messiah, but their campaigns shortly fizzled out.

### *WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS (VS.6-7)*

The period between roughly 30-60 AD was relatively peaceful, but shortly after that time wars and rumors of wars began to crop up. After some political unrest, the Jews in Jerusalem rebelled against Rome which resulted in Nero to send Vespasian to lead an army to quell the rebellion. Ultimately, the so-called First Jewish-Roman War took place. The Roman army, led by the future Emperor Titus, with Tiberius Julius Alexander as his second-in-command, besieged and conquered the city of Jerusalem, which had been controlled by Judean rebel factions since 66 AD. In this event, the Temple was totally destroyed.

It’s not uncommon for modern-day believers to treat these verses as something to look out for today before the end, but this is an oversight of the text. The time of the end, on the other hand, will be during a time that no one expects (Matt. 24:44). These things are merely, “the beginning of birth pangs” (Matt. 24:8).

### *PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS (V.9)*

Jesus now moves from some generalized signs that include everyone to a more specific group of signs that affect only believers. As things escalate, Christians will come under persecution from the very people they are trying to witness to, and will experience torture and even death.

### *APOSTASY (V.10)*

Because of the persecution, many will have to consider whether they are truly Christians. It is no secret that in churches every Sunday there are both believers and non-believers. Sometimes the non-believers would consider themselves Christians, but the truth is that they are not and it will be evidenced when the pressure is turned up. Paul reiterates this very reality in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.”

Those who endure, however, will be saved. Not only will they endure persecution, but will actively go on ministering and sharing the Gospel to all of the world. This, Jesus says, must happen before the end.

### *THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION (VS.15-16)*

It was long believed by the Jews that the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel in Daniel 7 was fulfilled through the events that took place under the tyrannical reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 175-164 BC. His brutal persecution of the Jews and desecration of the Temple fit the idea of what the

abomination of desolation entailed. However, Jesus is speaking of a time in which this still hasn't happened, and so He must have been envisioning something else. This is yet another example of Matthew's usage of typology. There was a near-view, actual fulfillment in Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but yet a greater, typological fulfillment that would still come to pass. As bad as the desecration of the Temple was under Antiochus IV, an even more abominable thing has yet to come.

#### ***JESUS' APPEARANCE (V.27)***

Jesus' advice to the disciples is to not trust others when they say that the Messiah is in this place or that place. There will be no need for anyone to tell anyone else that Jesus has come, for all will be aware. His illustration is that of lightning, which flashes in one side of the sky but can be seen from the other. In this same way, Jesus' coming will be visible to all.

#### ***THE SHAKING OF THE HEAVENS (VS.29-31)***

The sun and the moon will give off no light, rendering the world completely dark. The stars falling is another way of indicating that even the stars will not provide light. This is not as significant in our modern western world, but for the ancients, the stars were an enormous source of light and directing power. All loss of light will be a result of the power of heaven being shaken up. This kind of language has been used repeatedly in the Old Testament to describe the Day of the Lord (Isa. 24:21, 23; Joel 2:10; Amos 5:20, 8:9; Zeph. 1:15).

#### ***NO ONE KNOWS THE HOUR (VS.36-51)***

The signs will be there, and they will indicate to the believers that the end is drawing near, but what does that really mean? Jesus tells His followers to be on the alert, and be prepared. Be ready! But how? There is a great amount of obsession over signs of the end, and this kind of obsession misses the point. Jesus is showing believers through all of this that though bad things are going to happen, to not be alarmed or dissuaded from sharing the Gospel to other people because ultimately all of these bad things are a part of God's sovereign plan. If Christians, knowing that tribulation exists as a part of His plan, will continue to faithfully live out their faith, they will be found ready in that unexpected hour when Jesus comes.

#### ***PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS (VS.1-13)***

It's easy to try and squeeze layers and layers of meaning out of a parable, but to do so is to misunderstand the point of a parable. The parable is used to illustrate one big idea, and nothing else. This parable's big idea is this: "Be prepared for Jesus' return!" Some of the virgins were prepared and some were not, and when the bridegroom came, the ones who were not prepared missed Him. So too will people, who are not ready for Jesus' return, miss Him.

#### ***TALENTS AND FINAL JUDGMENT (V.14-49)***

The final parable is regarding talents. Once again, there is one main idea: "If you use what God has given you it will expand and mature. If you do not, it will be of no use." Jesus closes this section by talking about the final judgment in which Jesus will sit on His throne, and believers and non-believers will be gathered together and judged and distributed to either heaven or hell.

## **Study Questions**

### **Day One**

1. Read Matthew 24:1-8. What does Jesus say that spurs on the disciples to ask questions about the end? What are the first two signs that Jesus says will take place. Are these immediate or future events?
2. Read Matthew 24:9-28. What signs are described in this passage? What is the abomination of desolation? Has it already happened yet or will it happen in the future? (Hint: See above notes)

### Day Two

1. Read Matthew 24:29-35. What is described in this passage regarding the end? Read Daniel 7:2 and 7:13. Read Revelation 8:2 and 11:15. Do these events have anything to do with these verses? Why or why not? What is the lesson of the fig tree?
2. Read Matthew 24:36-44. In your own words, summarize this passage. What is the main idea of this passage, and how does it correlate to everything Jesus has already said?

### Day Three

1. Read Matthew 24:45-51. In your own words, summarize this illustration. What is the main idea of this passage? Does it say the same thing or something different than the previous passage? Why or why not?
2. Read Matthew 25:1-11. What is the main idea of the parable of the ten virgins? (Hint: See above notes)

### Day Four

1. Read Matthew 25:12-30. What is the main idea of the parable of the talents? (Hint: See above notes)
2. Read Matthew 25:31-49. What does this passage describe? On a piece of paper, create two columns. Name the first column, "the sheep," and the second column, "the goats." Write down the differences between the sheep and the goats.

## Week 28 Discussion: America's Got Talent

Matthew 25 contains the well-known parable of the talents. Talents in the ancient world were weights of money, and the parable contains a spiritual principle that is still true today: "If you use it, it grows and matures. If you don't use it, it goes to waste." Talk as a group about your actual talents that God has given you, how you use them, and how they can be used for His glory.

1. Icebreaker: What kind of talents do you have?
2. Do you use your talents or have you let them go to waste? Why?
3. What are ways you could use your talents to serve the local church?
4. What are ways you could use your talents to witness to non-believers?
5. If you have stopped using your talents, why did you stop? What made you quit? What steps can you take to begin again?
6. How have you seen God already use your talents to benefit other people spiritually?

### Takeaways:

1. There will be many signs that will take place before the end, but the time of the end will be unexpected.
2. Believers ought to be ready, and actively using what God has given them to minister to others in preparation for His return.
3. The end will include Jesus on His throne judging everyone based on their faithfulness to Him.

#### *PRAYER REQUESTS:*