

Matthew 24-25

Structure of Matthew 24 is central to how we understand Eschatology. Our structure must account for:

- 1). The plain meaning for the 1st century listeners and readers, and
- 2). The parallel accounts in the other Gospels to ensure there is no contradiction in our interpretation.

Matthew 24:1-28 – “Messianic Birth Pains”

Verse 3 – The disciples express their misunderstanding that the destruction of the temple, the end of age, and the coming of the Messiah will all be connected in one event.

Verses 4-28 - Following are "The birth Pains of the Messiah" which are paralleled in extra-biblical literature.

Verse 8 – These are the beginning of birth pains. These events were happening at that time during Christ’s First Advent and will continue until His Return. That they mark the “beginning” of the Messianic birth pains articulates a delay between the First and Second Comings. Nevertheless, there will be an intensification of these “birth pains” with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD reflected in verses 15-21.

Verse 10 – Persecution and apostasy characterize the time between the First and Second Comings of the Messiah. NOTE (Verses 12-13): Doctrine of the ‘Perseverance of the Saints’ (ref. *John 2:23-25* and ‘fickle faith’).

Verses 15-21 - These verses are historically specific passages making reference to 1st century Jerusalem. "abomination that causes desolation", when compared to other Gospel accounts, is combined with the armies approaching the City. Upon seeing this, Christians fled to the wilderness. "let the reader understand" refers to the reader of the Book of Daniel. Daniel 7 marks the end of the pagan emperor's rule; therefore, Matthew 24 cannot specifically depict this here, in this context; because, after 70 AD, Rome continues its rule for some time.

Verse 21 – This is a difficult verse to understand regardless of one’s Eschatology. When Romans closed in upon Jerusalem, no one escaped alive. All Jews were either killed or enslaved. The horrors of 70 AD were recorded by Josephus. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans may also serve as a type, or a foreshadow, of an intensification of Inter-Advent tribulation immediately prior to Christ’s Return.

Verses 22-28 (Verses 4-5, 11) – **Verse 22** shifts our focus from the temple/ Jerusalem to worldwide humanity. “No one” (no ‘flesh’) is general (not specific to Jews) and communicates that ‘nobody’ would survive apart from

God’s intervention. These verses refer to the entire Church Age between Christ’s First and Second Comings. "Many people will listen to many prophets. The warning here is NOT against skepticism but against credulity [a tendency to be too ready to believe that something is real or true]" (Carson). Jesus’ Return will be as visible as lighting in the sky and vultures circling around carrion. We will not miss it, so we are not to go after "falsely" / "self" ‘anointed’ teachers / prophets who profess they have it figured out!

Characteristics of the “Messianic Birth Pains” Between Jesus’ First and Second Comings: *The Inter-Advent Period or Church Age*

1. International Conflicts (Verses 6-7a)
2. Natural Disasters (Verse 7b)
3. Persecuting Opposition (Verse 9)
4. Apostasy and Spiritual Conflicts (Verse 10)
5. Worldwide Gospel Proclamation until the End (Verse 14).
7. Deceptive claims of “False Christs” and False Prophets who propagate false teaching (Verses 4-5, 11, 23-26). This Includes "self-anointed" prophets and teachers who claim they are specially anointed by God to speak for Him something in addition to or contrary to His Word.

Matthew 24:29-44 – “Signs of Christ’s Return with an Exhortation on How to Wait”

Verses 29-31 - "Immediately" refers to after the “distress” / tribulation of the entire Inter-Advent Age. The language articulates cosmic upheaval and the overthrow of earthly kingdoms and their corresponding heavenly powers. This began at Christ’s First Coming and will be completed upon His Return which will occur after the "distress" / tribulation of the Church / Inter-Advent Age (“those days”). “Then” of **Verse 30** is not following verse 29 but during that time. Events in these verses are coterminous. Also, while “peoples of the earth” could be translated as “the tribes of the land”, that same vocabulary describes Gentiles in “The Revelation” (1:7). This is not a secret ‘coming’. While Christ indeed reigns NOW, it remains a contested reign. When He Returns, it will be uncontested in the fullness of Daniel 7 for all to see. D-day (First Coming) and V-Day (Return) analogy, and we currently live in between these two Comings of Jesus.

Verses 32-35 – These verses go back to assessing the significance of the signs in *verses 4-28*. While the ‘fig tree’ typically refers to Israel, here that connection is not intended. "All these things" in verse 33 refers to the tribulation prior to His Return. These are the signs that characterize the time between His two Comings and that precede His imminent/looming Return. While there is a

delay, He can Come Again at any time. "Generation" of *verse 34*, in this context, refers to those alive at that time who Jesus is addressing. All these things do, indeed, take place within that generation of hearers, but they are not said they will all end in that generation with His Return! Those hearing Jesus would already experience the tribulation/ "distress" described (the same tribulations we should expect to experience in our day as well between the two Comings of Christ). These things will continue until Christ's Return after a time of significant delay as expressed in the subsequent parables.

Verses 36-44 – This section articulates the suddenness of Christ's Return and is clear that no one will know the day or hour of His Return. In *verse 36*, there is a sense, more comprehensively articulated in John's Gospel, that Jesus' abandoned His independent use of His divine prerogatives to His Father's will as the God-man to fulfill His redeeming mission. The Eternal Son and Word set this divine prerogative aside to do that only which His Father wills when He took on flesh and became a man. This is an aspect of the subordination of the Son to His Father revealed. This is how Jesus did not know the time of His Return; His Father, in Jesus' humanity, did not reveal to Him this knowledge. Therefore, it is near blasphemy for anyone to think they can discern it. Beginning in *verse 37* are exhortations for us to be vigilant throughout the delay until Christ Returns. This is the issue at stake. It is about the preparedness of our hearts for when He returns; not about charts signifying events prior to His Return. The point of making a parallel with Noah is to highlight the ordinariness of the events in the world at the time of Christ's sudden Return. The point of *verses 41-42* is merely to highlight the suddenness, not to explain who is taken to where or who is left behind for what (Carson). To facilitate our understanding of this, Jesus gives four parables to exhort us to be careful and watchful during the delay of His Return; because, there will be no warning. The 'parousia' / Second Coming will be unexpected.

Matthew 24:45-25 – "Parables Articulating How We Are to Wait for Christ's Return in the Midst of Delay"

NOTE how the parables stress a delay with a call to remain alert and ready. There is a great delay; because, the kingdom is "now" inaugurated but "not yet" consummated.

Characteristics of Our Waiting

1. The Wicked Servant (24:45-51) - As stewards, we will have to give an account for our service; faithful or otherwise. Notice that there is never much

compassion for hypocrites! Suffering (weeping) and Despair (gnashing of teeth).

2. The Ten Virgins (25:1-13) - Wait for the Lord as celebrants who make careful preparations in the event the celebration is delayed. NOTE that there is not a problem with the sleeping and there is no special significant meaning behind the oil. The "Bride" is not mentioned; because, that is irrelevant to the point.

3. The Talents/Bags of Gold (25:14-30) - Wait as servants called to improve our Master's assets. NOTE how the wicked servant unjustly characterizes his Master and, therefore, skirts his responsibility. Virgins thought it was too easy and were unprepared, and wicked servant thought it was too difficult. What have we done with all the assets (money, time, gifts, ability, interpersonal skills, etc.) God has given us; especially if we possess things that our a perceived need among your Brethren (see following parable). Servants are rewarded with both blessedness and increased responsibility in the King's Kingdom.

4. The Sheep and the Goats - Wait for the Lord as people whose lives are so unselfconsciously transformed by the gospel that we are characterized by self sacrificial service toward our Brethren in Christ. NOTE that both groups are surprised about the REASON for their status before God. The surprise of the righteous demonstrates that they did NOT see their works as meritorious. This passage eliminates the possibility of hypocrisy. The righteous live as who they are. This is demonstrated in what they do. Sins of omission is the key here (not serving fellow Christians when there's a need is equivalent to not serving Jesus as He commands). Eternity involves degrees of felicity and degrees of torment.

Evaluating Two Communities NOT Waiting as the Lord Exhorts

Corinthians had an over realized Eschatology characteristic of the triumphalism in the prosperity gospel (Ref. 1 Corinthians 4). They thought of themselves as wise and part of the inside track. This caused divisions among. They became satisfied with the comforts of this world; seeking worldly blessings according to worldly standards. They claimed too much of our promised inheritance within Christ's *inaugurated* kingdom.

Thessalonians were opposite of the Corinthians. They immediately faced suffering and persecution! They abandoned the world entirely because of their expectation of the Lord's imminent Return. They became idle and did not pull their weight within the congregation. While there's no triumphalism, they became irresponsible by opting out of society. They claimed too little of Christ's *inaugurated* kingdom.