

Matthew 23:37-24:14, 32-51: Olivet Discourse I: Signs and timing of the end time

In His last sermon of Matthew Jesus gives the most detail account of His second return.

1. Discourse background and signs for the end time. 23:37-24:14 (cf. Mk 13, Lk 21:10-18)

Christ predicts Jerusalem's destruction and quoting the same Psalm recorded in Mt 21:9. He states that His next entrance as king to the city will be in His second coming (23:37-39). Under this context, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, and the disciples perceive that He is referring to the end time **(1-3)**. So on Mt. Olives they ask Jesus two questions, namely when and what will be the signs of the end time. **24:4-25:46** is Jesus' answer and teaching to His disciples, and **Mk. 13:4** has "all" to show that these two questions are equally covered. He first warns them on the danger of being misled **(24:4-5)**. The many "false Christs" in history testify to this truth, and surely one-way to avoid it is to study these passages carefully. Jesus starts with their second question on the signs and five groups seemingly in chronological order are given. Note that there must a Jewish Jerusalem, which is so after 1967 and thus we can now await their fulfillment. In **v6-8** is the first group consisting of wars, famines and earthquakes – great havoc on earth which is both man-made and by the forces of nature. Jesus makes clear in v6 that just hearing of wars alone is not yet the end, but when all these signs truly occur and together, it's the beginning of birth pangs (8). The second group in **v9-14** is great turmoil for the saints with persecutions, apostasies and heresies. It is found also in **Mk. 13:9-13**. Note that in the passage in Mark, Jesus seemed to be predicting the persecution of His disciples impending persecution. This is so similar to **Lu. 21:10-18** on events before 70 A.D. which have been accurately fulfilled. Matt. 24:9-10 is somewhat different: Jesus predicted the persecutions of believers in the end time; a similar prophecy as recorded here is found in **Matt. 10:17-22** which is also for the end time. Since Mark interwoven **Mk. 13:9-13** in Jesus' answer for the disciples' questions, it suggests that severe persecutions as inflicted on the early Church would similarly also occur at the end time (see Rev. 6:9). One verse to note is **24:14** and **Mk. 13:10** which is not in Luke, for the gospel is **now** preached to all nations as a witness and is known worldwide, but not so in 70 AD. In spite of the turmoil, the gospel shall be preached to all the world and in v14, He says "then the end will come". The third to the fifth groups will be discussed in another 1-page.

2. The timing of the end time and the call to be alert. 32- 51

Jesus deals with the question on "when" by first asking them to learn from the fig tree **(32-35)**. When these signs begin like new leaves, we should be looking out for them as His words are certain (Mt. 24:35). From these the advent of summer is deduced and likewise the period with all these signs will involve only one generation (34). This fits with other scriptures stating that the tribulation will merely be for seven years (e.g. Dan. 9:27). However, though the final generation may be identified, the precise timing is not known and will take many by surprise as in Noah's flood **(36-41)**. If the season can be deduced, how can one still be taken unaware, unless His "coming" actually spans the seven years and v39 refers to its beginning? Moreover the lifestyle in v38 is not of dire stress and it is better to take the event in v40-41 as before the tribulation. It is the rapture as described also in 1Thess. 4:13-18 and it ushers in the tribulation but the exact date is unknown. He then teaches parables on the proper way to live while waiting for His return. The parable of the chief slave in the house **(24:43-51)** is a call to be both alert and faithful in serving God. So we must always be ready, to be found faithfully working when He comes.

Lesson to Ponder: "Household" in **v45** is "oiketeia" or the group of slaves in the house and the slave in charge is to feed them well. It is in essence good pastoral care, which God expects to find on His return. The slave in charge is evil **(48)** and a hypocrite **(51)**. So he cannot be a believer and is sent to hell. Still the lesson is for shepherds to be faithful in their task **(46)**.

馬太福音 23:37-24:14， 32-51: 橄欖山上的講道(一)—末日要來的徵兆

耶穌在馬太福音的最後一篇講論，非常詳盡地講到祂的再來。

1. 講道的背景和末日後的徵兆 - 23:37-24:14 節 (參考馬可福音 13 及路加福音 21:10-18)

基督預言耶路撒冷的毀滅，該詩篇祂先前在 21:9 引用過，祂指出當祂再以君王的身分進城時，那將是祂再來的時候 (23:37-39)。在這背景下，耶穌預言聖殿將會被毀，而門徒意識到祂是指到末日的時候(1-3 節)。因此在橄欖山上，他們問了耶穌兩個問題，就是末日會在甚麼時候發生，和會有甚麼徵兆。24:4-25:46 是主耶穌給門徒的答案和教導，馬可福音 13:4 的「一切」則顯示這兩道問題都得以回應。首先，耶穌警告他們小心不要受騙(4-5 節)。歷史上出現過的許多「假基督」證實了主這警告。要避免這情況，其中一個方法無疑是小心查考這些經文。耶穌先從他們第二個有關徵兆的問題說起，祂講了五組似乎是按時序的預兆。6-8 節是第一組，包括了戰爭、饑荒以及地震 — 這些都是地球將會出現的災難，既有人為的，也有是自然因素造成的。在第 6 節耶穌明白的說，單有戰事發生還未到末期，只有當這些徵兆都同時發生時，那才是災難的起頭 (8 節)。第二組是聖徒要面對很多變亂，包括逼迫，背道和異端(9-14 節)。這在馬可福音 13:9-13 也提到。但留意在馬可福音中，主耶穌似乎是在預言門徒將要面對的逼害。在主後一世紀這些確然發生了。這說法是馬可獨有的，因為在馬太福音 24:9-10 耶穌所預言的逼迫都是在末世才會發生的。這和路加福音 21:10-18 有關主後 70 年的情況是非常的近似，後者已絲毫不差地應驗了。馬太福音 24:9-10 卻與這兩段不同：主耶穌預言信徒在末世要受逼迫；在馬太福音 10:19-22 亦有相若、與末世相關的記載。馬可既然將馬可福音 13:9-13 的經文交織在主對門徒的回答中，意味著初期教會所面對的逼迫在末世也會同樣發生 (見啟示錄 6:9)。一句要留意的經文是 24:14 和馬可福音 13:10，在路加福音並無提及，就是福音如今已傳遍地極，而在主後 70 年這並未發生，這是表明這預兆今天在進行著。這些先期的徵兆和啟示錄的頭四個印章非常吻合，而逼迫則是啟示錄 6:1-11 第五個印章的情景。雖然動盪不安，福音還是會傳遍世界，而在 14 節，耶穌說到「然後終結才來到」。第三組到第五組的預兆會在另一篇一頁釋義中討論。

2. 末日到來的時候和吩咐要警醒-32-51 節

耶穌在這裏回答他們會在「甚麼時候發生」這問題。祂先要他們從無花果樹學習道理 (32-35 節)。觀察無花果樹就能推斷夏天的到來，同樣在末世來臨前，所有徵兆都會在一個世代內出現 (34 節)。這和其他地方提到大災難的經文非常吻合——大災難就只有七年時間 (例:但以理書 9:27)。不過末日到來的實際時間並無人知道，就如挪亞時代的洪水，令許多人措手不及一樣(36-41 節)。只是既然能推斷發生的時候，為何人對這些事仍然無所防範? 只有祂的「降臨」橫跨七年的時間，而 39 節所指的是這七年開頭的事才能解釋。還有就 38 節的形容，人當時的生活方式似乎並無絲毫的壓力，所以對 40-41 節的情景最好的理解是：這些事都是發生在大災難之前。這也就是帖撒羅尼迦前書 4:13-18 所描述的被提。被提宣告大災難的開始，但實際日期卻無人知道。祂接著講了好幾個比喻，教導在等候祂回來的日子時當怎樣生活。管家的比喻 (24:43-51) 是提醒要警醒和忠心服侍神。所以我們得常作準備 (42-44 節)，好等主回來時，看見我們是忠心地在工作(45-51 節)。

思想心得：45 節「全家」一字的希臘文是“oiketeia”，是指家裏所有的僕人，那管理僕役的僕人必須按時分配糧食給其他人。簡言之這就是良好的牧養工作，是當主再來時，祂期望看見的。比喻中的僕役是惡僕 (48 節)，是假冒為善之人 (51 節)，所以他不可能是信主的，最終他要被送到地獄去。要學的功課是：作牧人的得好好在他的工作上忠心 (46 節)。