THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN COMING

Matthew 24:1-31

Key Verse: 24:30

“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”

After studying the book of Revelation, 1 John, 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Daniel, now we want to study Matthew 24, which is about our Lord Jesus’ second coming. In the Old Testament, the prophets saw Jesus’ first and second coming as one event. In the New Testament, Jesus’ teaching concerning his coming again was recorded more than any other teaching including his death and resurrection, and in the epistles all the writers talked about Jesus’ coming back to the earth. The Bible ends, except the final greeting, with Jesus’ words, ‘Yes, I am coming soon’ and John’s response, ‘Amen, Come Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20). Today’s passage is the prophecy of Jesus’ own regarding his coming, his very vivid coming. This prophetic teaching of Jesus was brought out as his answer to the disciples’ question about his coming and the sign of the end of the age.

When we think of Jesus’ disciples, their main concern was the glorious kingdom of the Messiah, which is related to the kingdom to Israel. We remember that after confessing that Jesus is the Christ, Peter rejected the way of Christ, the suffering and death of Christ. While on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus taught his disciples again that he would be betrayed and condemned to death by religious leaders and would be turned over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. Still their concern was about who would sit at the right and left of the Messiah in his glorious kingdom. They were still dreaming of the kingdom of Christ without the suffering. When Jesus cleared the temple and said, “Look, your house is left to you desolate” in 23:38, the disciples might have thought that Jesus was purging the temple and resetting everything as a preparation to establish the messianic kingdom. Like many other Jews they thought that Christ’s kingdom would appear at once (Lk 19:11). Even after his resurrection hearing about the kingdom of God during a period of forty days, they asked Jesus, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Ac 1:6). This mindset of the disciples is the background of today’s passage.

The whole point of the sermon of Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25 is to tell them that the restoration is not right now. Undoubtedly, Jesus had the whole view of God’s history to the time of the end. Of course, the purpose of Jesus’ sermon in these chapters was not just for the disciples, but for all the believers to come until the end of the age, particularly keeping in mind the people of the last generation of this world. The scope of these words of Jesus is far reaching – to the end of the world, just as Daniel’s prophecy was concerning the distant future, the end of the time. Each succeeding generation is closer to that end. Compared to the disciples of Jesus, we are much closer to the end of the age, though we don’t know how close.

Verse 1 says, “Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.” In this situation, Jesus asked, “Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” The temple called Herod’s temple had been built from 20 BC for forty-six years until Jesus’ time and were still under construction to the completion by AD 64 (Jn 2:20). It was indeed a magnificent building. So Jesus’ prediction of the temple’s destruction was really surprising, even to the degree that not one stone would be left on another, with emphasis on “every one [would] be thrown down”. There is a double negative emphasis. However, the prophecy was exactly fulfilled by the Roman general Titus and his Roman army in AD 70. The general Titus ordered the soldiers to stop the destruction, saying, “It is enough.” Yet, the soldiers took away every stone to collect the gold placed in between stones. In this way, they unwittingly fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus. This signifies that the following prophecies of Jesus will be fulfilled concisely.

Then verse 3 says, “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ To the disciples the destruction of the temple was related to the end of the age and the arrival of Christ’s kingdom. So, the following verses are Jesus’ answer to these questions of his disciples, ‘when’ and ‘what sign.’ This question and answer on the Mount of Olives is called “the Olivet discourse” written in Matthew 24 and 25. Jesus first provides an answer regarding the signs.

In verse 4, Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you.” Here we should really understand ‘you’. Who is the audience? Of course, apparently they are his disciples who asked the question. However, we should think of ‘you’ throughout this passage. He said in verse 15, “So when you see the standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel”, in verse 20-21, “Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again”, and in verses 33-34, “Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” Definitely, here ‘this generation’ was not the generation of the disciples but the generation that will encounter Christ Jesus coming on the clouds. We know that the period from Jesus’ first coming to his second coming is the last times or the last days. So ‘you’ can include all the believers living during these last times, yet particularly the generation of Jesus’ very coming. This kind of the usage of ‘you’ is a usual way of writing prophecies. For example, when Jesus sent out the twelve disciples for the field work training, he said in Matthew 10:23, “When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” Definitely, it is ultimately pointed to the future disciples who would see his coming. Another example is Zechariah 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Certainly, here ‘you’ points to the people in Jerusalem who would see this event of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. This kind of writing is an editorial privilege given to a prophet ([Isaiah 33:17-24](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Isa%2033.17-24); [Isaiah 66:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Isa%2066.10-14)).  This concept of “you” helps us to understand the prophecies of the Bible.

Now let’s read verses 4-5, “Jesus answered: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.” Also verse 11 says, “and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.” And verse 24 says, “For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect.” There have been many such deceptions throughout history. How, at the end of the age the deception would be worldwide. In this passage, the word “deceive” is written 4 times. The deception comes to its apex at the appearing of the final Antichrist. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11, “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie.” People can wonder how they believe the lie. Yet they believe the life when they refuse to love the truth. There is no alternative when they reject the truth. They are deceived, and again they believe the lie. With human decision not to be deceived they cannot overcome this sinful mind. The only way to overcome deception and lie is to love and hold to the truth.

Then Jesus says in verses 6-7, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.” Again, also there have been many wars throughout history. However, at the end of time, the degree of wars will be unequaled in history. When we think of nuclear weapons in our time, we can imagine the scale of the wars. There will be also worldwide famines and earthquakes in various places. In Luke’s gospel, “pestilences and fearful events and great signs from heaven” are included. It is interesting that these signs, deception, war, famine are in accordance with Revelation 6. At the opening of the first seal, there was a white horse and its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. He is offering a disguised peace, having no arrows but only a bow. It is also written in Daniel 7:27, “He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven’” This covenant is a covenant of world peace in disguise. At the opening of the second seal there was a fiery red horse. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword, which is definitely related to the war. At the opening of the third seal, there was a black horse. Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand with the voice heard, “A quart of wheat for a day’s wages, and three quarts of barley for a day’s wages…” What a famine it will be! And at the opening of the fourth seal there was a pale horse. Its rider was named Death, killing one fourth of the people on the earth with sword, famine and plague…”

And then Jesus says in verse 8, “All these are the beginning of birth pains.” Jesus did not say,
All these are God’s punishment upon mankind” or “All these are unpreventable future events.” Birth pains come during a specific time and at first the pains are less severe and comes in slow intervals. Then it becomes intense, coming rapidly in short consecutive periods until the birth. In the book of Revelation, we see the unfolding of the seals.  Six seals are unfolded and then the seventh.  And bursting out of the seventh seal comes seven trumpets. And bursting out of the seventh trumpet comes seven bowls of wrath poured on the earth.  There’s increasing speed.  It seems that the seals go over a period of years.  The trumpets, over a period perhaps of weeks, and the bowls, maybe over a period of days or hours as the birth pains become closer and closer, more compressed, more concurrent at the end. Here, the important thing is that the birth pains result in the birth of a new kingdom of Christ through his coming, as a baby is born through the woman’s birth pains. In the birth pains are contained such a hope.

In verse 9, Jesus continues, “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.’ We know that early Christians including the disciples were so persecuted. Throughout history, true Christians were also severely persecuted. They lived each day as if it were the last day of their lives, as Apostle Paul confessed, “I die every day.” At the end of the age the persecution will be also very severe. In Revelation 6, at the opening of the fifth seal the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony thy had maintained called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”

Then here verse 10 says, “At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and ate each other.” Paul also said in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, “Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion/the apostacy occurs…” At the end of the age many will turn away from the faith, the faith that is common to all the saints. Great apostacy will take place. This apostacy is written in the whole chapter of Revelation 17 in the picture of a great prostitute dressed in purple and scarlet contrasted to a bride dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

And Jesus says in verse 22, “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.” The concept of community will become weaker and weaker, becoming more and more individualistic, as the love of most grow cold. Hebrews 10:25 says, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

And in verses 13 and 14, “but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Preaching the gospel, the gospel of the kingdom, is to take the priority in the lives of Christians, the disciples of Jesus. After his resurrection Jesus said to his disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the good news” (Mk 16:15). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised according to the Scriptures.” To him, preaching the gospel was as of first importance in his life. Paul also said to Timothy, “In the presence of God and of Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word…” (2 Timothy 4:1-2). And Romans 9:28 says, “For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.” It is really interesting that at the end of the age God raises 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel as gospel preachers (7:4), and two powerful witnesses, who were killed but raised to life and went up to heaven. All people on earth will see this scene (11:11-12). Even an angel flying in midair proclaims the eternal gospel to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people, saying, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come…” (14:6-7). This shows God’s heart desire to save perishing souls by making the gospel be preached to all people of all nations in the world. Then the end will come. The gospel of the kingdom is the only hope for the people of this earthly kingdom.

Now let’s read verse 15. “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand--” As we studied in Daniel, the abomination of desolation is an unambiguous sign of the start of the second-half of the seven-year Tribulation, called the Great Tibulation of three and half years. Particularly, 9:27b says, “In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.” The expression, “abomination that causes desolation” is written 3 times in the book of Daniel. In 11:31, “His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.” This was what Antiochus Epiphanes did. He erected a statue of the main god of the Greeks, Zeus, on the very altar in the temple. He slayed a pig on the altar in the temple, and made the priests eat pork. He abominated the temple to make it desolate. He was the prefigure of the final Antichrist called the willful king. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods (11:36). And the preincarnate Christ said in Daniel 12:11, “From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.” Paul also said in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, “He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.” This is truly the abomination of the desolation. According to Revelation 13:8 all inhabitants of the earth will worship him, the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life.

In that situation, what should be done? Jesus says in verses 16-18, “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.” It is said that during the time of the holocaust of Jerusalem by Roman soldiers, those who obeyed this command of Jesus survived, but those who ignored it were all killed. During the time of the Great Tribulation, the same thing will happen, this time under the rule of the final Antichrist, who will pitch his royal tents at the beautiful holy mountain between the Mediterranean and the Dead sea (Da 11:45). According to Jesus, this will happen specifically in Judea. Yet, we all need the spirit of fleeing and not going back. As S. Ian confessed, because he refused the temptation of going back to his former lifestyle, he could be Ian today. We know that at the very time to flee, Lot’s wife looked back missing her beautiful house and nice kitchen and treasures, and became a pillar of salt. Jesus said in Luke 17:31-32, “On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot’s wife!” And then Jesus spoke further, “Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.”

In verse 19 Jesus continues, “How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!” When the Antichrist rules, this is an indication that there’s going to be the devastation of infants. Hoses 13:16b says, “They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open.” In verse 20, “Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.” What realistic advice in his concern!

Verse 21 says, “For then there will be great distress/tribulation, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again.” We are reminded of Daniel 12:1, “…There will be a time of distress/tribulation such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.” Bible teaching is really consistent. It is about seven years of the tribulation, more specifically three and half years of the great tribulation, a time, times and half a time. This is Jacob’s trouble written in Jeremiah 30:7, “How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.”

Jesus continues in verse 22, “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.” What does this mean? We know that ‘one seven’ is clearly set apart. Seven years of tribulation including three and half years of the great tribulation is determined and so cannot be altered. The only way to shorten such a period is to shorten daylights. Revelation 8:12 says, “The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.” Probably it’s related to the shortening of daylight by a third. Then in 16:10 it says, “The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness…” It seems that what’s happening is gradually less and less daylight until ultimately at the end of the tribulation period, it’s total darkness. Anyway, what is certain is that God has power to shorten those days not contradicting his whole plan. If it is necessary for the sake of the elect, he can restructure the entire universe. What amazing care for the elect!

In verses 23-26 Jesus says, “At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ! or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.” Many will appear as ones who can solve the problems of the world and ameliorate the world. The people of the world should know that the world is heading toward the destruction and utter darkness before the new world of Christ’s kingdom.

Verse 27 says, “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” Christ’s second coming will be totally different from his first coming. His first coming was silent and local and tiny, but his second coming will be powerful, universal and grand and majestic, visible to all. And in verse 28 it says, “Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.” His second coming will be such obvious to judge the corrupt and deadened world. It is a vivid picture of Christ’s coming.

In verse 29 Jesus says, “Immediately after the distress of those days ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’” This is prophesied in the Old Testament. The LORD says in Isaiah 13:9-11, “See, the day of the LORD is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless.” It is written three times in Joel: in 2:10, “Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.” The LORD also says in Joel 2:30-31, “I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” And in 3:15, “The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine.” And John wrote in [Revelation 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Rev%206.12)-13, “I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.”

Apostle Peter quoted the words of Joel 2:30-31 and wrote in Acts 2:19-20, “I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.” What an understanding of the day of the coming of the Lord. Yes, it is the great and dreadful day according to the prophet Joel and at the same time the great and glorious day according to apostle Peter’s understanding. For it is the end of the present evil age and the beginning of the bright and righteous age. Zechariah 14:6-7 says, “On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light.” How interesting it is. Where does the light come?

Then Jesus says in verse 30 says, “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.” The coming of the Son of Man will give light, shining over all the places of the earth. For Revelation 21:23 says, “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” He will come on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. The people of Israel had a glimpse of the glory when it dwelt between the wings of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and the temple.  They saw it as a pillar of cloud that led them by day and a fire that led them by night. But at the time of the coming of the Son of Man, his great and full glory will be revealed universally.

In the Old Testament, the cloud represents the divine presence. He will come on the clouds of the sky. Daniel also saw this coming in his vision, “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with clouds of heaven.” (Da 7:13). At the time of trial before the Sanhedrin Jesus said, “But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64). And at the time of Jesus’ ascension into a cloud, two angels came and said, “This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven” (Ac 1:11). Revelation 1:7 also says, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.”

According to Matthew and John the world responds with mourning, all the peoples and nations of the earth. The Antichrist is destroyed by the splendour of his coming (2 Th 2:8). With the sword of his mouth he goes into Armageddon battle and deludes all the ungodly including the kings of the world (Rev 16:16; 19:20). He is KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev 19:16). His powerful and glorious coming encompasses the destruction of Babylon, that is the culmination of human civilization. In Revelation 18, six woes were poured out on Babylon: “Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!” (10), “Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!” (16-17), and “Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!” (19) The world is not enviable to God’s people. 1 John 2:15-17 says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world…For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the love of the eye, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

While the whole world mourns, those who belong to him will participate in his power and glory, entering his millennium kingdom. Paul says in Colossians 3:3-4, “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him glory.” We are also reminded of 1 Peter 4:13, “Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” Truly, suffering the course of living by faith and serving God’s flock of sheep in the ministry is really a privilege, when we think of the glory of Christ’s coming. May we not avoid or escape from it but take it willingly and more and more in the hope of participating in his glory.

We thank and praise God for the coming of the Son on Man on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. May we keep our faith in the second coming of our Lord Christ Jesus against the trend of the world and have priority in life of preaching the gospel of the kingdom, willingly participating in his suffering so that we can also share in his glory with the hope of the coming of Christ’s kingdom.