



WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL Volume 20 Number 40 October 22, 2025

Get Ready for the End Times! Part 4 **Matthew 24:32-41**

By Tal Davis

When it comes to the return of Christ, we would all like to know when that will occur. But no mere educated guess will do. We can read the signs, but we have to trust God for the actual timing. In this five-part series we are examining Jesus' teaching on the end times found in His speech on the Mount of Olives in Matthew, chapter 24.

As Jesus and his disciples left the Jerusalem Temple, they all then headed up to the nearby Mount of Olives. The disciples quizzed Him as to what was the sign of His coming. Jesus tells them of amazing events that would soon, and in the future, occur as precursors to the end times. (Matt. 24:1-22) In Part One we studied Matthew 24:1-14, and in Part Two we analyzed Matthew 24:15-22. To read Parts One and Two go here: <https://www.marketfaith.org/2025/08/get-ready-for-the-end-times-part-1-tal-davis/> and here: <https://www.marketfaith.org/2025/09/get-ready-for-the-end-times-part-2-tal-davis/>.

In Part Three, Matthew 24:23-31, Jesus presents a catalogue of warnings and illustrations about what to expect and how to respond in the last days. Read Part Three here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2025/09/get-ready-for-the-end-times-part-3-tal-davis/>

So now, in installment four, Jesus and the disciples were sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem. He earlier told them that the city and the Temple were bound to be destroyed (vs. 24:2) – which later took place in A.D. 70. Now, Jesus continues responding to their questions about when that would happen, and what would be the sign of His second coming (*parousia*). (vs. 24:3) He brilliantly uses several common images of life to illustrate His teaching. He begins by using one from a common fruit tree.

The Parable of the Fig Tree - Matthew 24:32-33

32 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: as soon as its branch has become tender and sprouts its leaves, you know that summer is near; 33 so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.

Have you ever eaten fig preserves? How about Fig Newtons? They are delicious and chewy. Figs were a common and favorite fruit for people in the Middle East for centuries before the time of Christ. They now grow around the world. Fig trees (Latin: *figus carica*; Greek: *suke*) have low thick limbs and wide

trunks – which in winter and fall are dormant and bare. Its branches have rough leaves which appear in the spring along with its fruit. The figs ripen in the summer months ready for picking. Cooks bake figs into cakes or can them to preserve them for other times. Jesus, on several occasions, used fig trees as object lessons for His teaching. (Matt. 7:16; Mark 11:13; Luke 21:27-31)

In this instance, in verse 32, Jesus was lecturing His disciples about the events leading up to the return of the Son of Man (i.e. Himself). He now delivers what is often called "The Parable of the Fig Tree." One of Jesus' favorite ways to teach was telling parables. A parable is a story from a real-life scenario, though not necessarily a real event, that teaches a lesson about the kingdom of God, His nature, repentance, morality, or some other spiritual principle. Sometimes they were short allegorical sayings (e.g.: "You are the salt of the earth" - Matt. 5:13). Others were more narrative stories involving personal relationships (e.g.: "A man who two sons." - Luke 15:11-32). This particular case really does not fit Jesus' usual pattern, but He certainly makes a key point.

As He spoke, Jesus may have pointed to a fig tree on the Mount of Olives to give the disciples a place to focus their attention. He tells them, "*Now learn the parable from the fig tree*," starting with a brief tutorial in agriculture. He was not really telling them something they did not already know. It was common knowledge. Nonetheless, Jesus explains what happens when a fig tree's "*branch has become tender and sprouts its leaves*." As the days grow longer and daily temperatures rise in spring, flowers begin to bloom and deciduous trees' leaves begin to reappear. He says, confirming what their years of life experience showed them, "*you know*" it is a sure sign that summer is coming soon.

In verse 33, Jesus starts to interpret the meaning of His short object lesson. He did not always clarify the meanings of His parables. In many cases He left it up to the listeners to figure out the somewhat enigmatic meanings. In other cases, He gave detailed explanations of the metaphorical identities of the characters or objects and their significance in the story (e.g.: The Parable of the Sower - Matt. 13:1-23).

Here Jesus explains that, like the fig tree's fruit reveals the coming of summer, when they see "*all these things*," it will be an alert that the time is growing near. The "*things*" are all the

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events that he warned about in His discourse. (vss. 1-26) They cannot, however, include His coming itself (vss. 24:27-31). They will be the precursors to His coming and will signal that *"He (the Son of Man) is near."* *"Near"* can mean either time or place. In this context, Jesus means His coming is to follow very soon after the cosmic events He has enumerated.

The Lord accentuates this point using a common image – *"right at the door."* Doors are often used figuratively in Scripture. Jesus even described Himself as *"the door,"* implying He is the one way to enter into the kingdom of God. (John 10:7-9) He also told the church in Laodicea that He was standing at their door and (figuratively) knocking to come in and dine with them. (Rev. 3:20) Obviously, when a householder hears a knock at the door she knows someone is standing right outside waiting to come inside. This word picture plainly emphasizes the closeness of a coming event. In this instance, the return of Christ. We don't know when Christ will return, and we should not jump to conclusions. But, we can look for the signs and listen for the doorbell.

This Generation - Matthew 24:34-35

34 Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

Jesus opens verse 34 with, *"Truly I say to you."* As we saw before, whenever Jesus prefaced a comment with that phrase, He was about to reveal something extraordinary (Part One, vs. 24:2). He intends for the listeners to pay special attention to His words. The Lord then makes a somewhat bewildering projection – which has been the source of debate among Bible students since the New Testament era. He specifically applies the prediction to *"this generation."* The obvious question is, to whom does *"this generation"* refer? A *"generation"* usually refers to a contemporary period of time and the major events occurring during the normal lifespan of a person. Jesus occasionally applied the term to the character of the wicked people of His day. (Matt. 11:16; 12:39; Luke 17:25) It could also be used to identify an indefinite span of time.

He says *"it will not pass away until all these things take place."* If Jesus meant that the generation then alive would see His coming again, then He must have been wrong. That, naturally, is not an acceptable premise. We are two thousand years later in time and He has not yet returned. For that reason, interpreters assume He had something else in mind. Generation (*genea*) can also mean *"race," "family,"* or an unspecified time period. So, some interpreters have argued, Jesus may have had the entire Jewish race in mind. In the mid-

20th century, some popular writers on Bible prophecy contended that the generation Jesus specified began at the birth of the modern State of Israel in 1948, and would last 40 years (what they reckoned to be a biblical generation). If, however, their calculations were accurate, then Christ should have returned in 1988.

Probably the correct assumption is that Jesus indeed intended *"this generation"* to mean those alive at that time in history, including the disciples whom He was addressing. Thus, many Bible students look at Jesus' statement as meaning just what it says. Note, He does not say that *"these things"* (the distresses) would necessarily end in that generation, but only that they would see them take place.

So actually, the best solution to this dilemma is to remember that in His Olivet Discourse, Jesus described two different future time periods and two distinct events. One was the destruction of the temple which occurred in A.D. 70 when the Romans sacked Jerusalem (Part One, vs. 24:1). The other period was His future return in glory to end this age at an unspecified (and unknown to anyone) future date. It seems entirely reasonable to suppose, in this statement, that Jesus was harkening back to His earlier warnings about the soon conquest by the Romans. Many, if not most, of the people alive when Jesus spoke would certainly still be living at that time.

Jesus finishes this section, in verse 35, with a strong proclamation asserting His own divine authority. He contrasts the limited and finite nature of both heaven and earth to the eternal and infinite nature of His words, *"Heaven and earth will pass away."* The universe may be great and immense with its billions of galaxies and stars, but it is not infinite and it is not eternal. If left to its own devices, the universe will run down and eventually die a cold death. However, at the appointed time, God will intervene to create a new heaven and a new earth. (Rev. 21:1)

Regardless of the finitude of the created order, and no matter what else happens, Jesus' words (*logoi*) *"will not pass away."* *"Will not"* translates two words, *ou* (no) and *me* (not) for a double emphasis. We might say, *"No, not ever!"* Or *"Never ever!"* His words, the absolute Truth of God (Jesus being the embodiment of that Truth) will outlive the universe itself. A billion years from now, when we are safely in our eternal home, Jesus' words will still forever comfort and inspire His people. In this context, we can trust God's Word about Christ's return, because His Word is eternal and unchanging. *"The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever."* (Isa. 40:8) *"Lord, your word is forever; it is firmly fixed in heaven."* (Psalm 119:89)

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Like the Days of Noah - Matthew 24:36-41

36 *"But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 At that time there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left."*

Jesus makes a marked turn from talking about *"these things"* that were going to happen. Now He makes a significant statement with important implications for the study of Christ's earthly incarnation and for eschatology. Verse 36 introduces the theme of the rest of the chapter concerning the uncertainty of the time of Christ's return.

In early 2025, a self-proclaimed prophet posted on Tik-Tok that God had revealed to him that the Rapture would occur on September 23rd of that year. Apparently, many people believed him. Obviously, he and they should have read Jesus' warning in this passage.

He begins with *"that day and hour,"* addressing the disciple's original question about His coming and the end of the age (vs. 24:3). In Scripture, those words are often synonyms for a time period in general, not just days on a calendar or hours on a clock. (Matt. 7:22; 10:19; 24:42, 44, 50; 25:13; 26:45) It is similar to the Old Testament's references to the time of final judgment as *"the Day of the Lord"* (Isa. 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15; Mal. 4:5)

Jesus' point is that *"no one knows"* the time of the end. Even *"the angels of heaven"* don't have that information. That the time frame of the end is not knowable to lowly humanity, or even to angels, is not that surprising. Therefore, any speculations by so-called prophecy experts are futile and misguided. Jesus already warned about those making wild claims to be the Messiah or saying they know where he is hiding. (24:4, 23-26)

But the Lord then makes a startling comment. He says not only does no person, nor do the angels, know the day or the hour, but not even *"the Son"* Himself knows! The study of the divine nature of Christ and His incarnation is what theologians call Christology. This verse is one of the plainest indications by Jesus Himself of the self-limitation of God the Son in His earthly incarnation as a man. Apparently, Jesus voluntarily did not exercise His divine attribute of total omniscience while on earth. This should not be surprising since

He also surrendered His omnipresence and submitted to the limitations of time and space. This is entirely in line with the essential Christian doctrine of the full Deity and full Humanity of Christ.

Only *"the Father alone"* (*Pater monos*) has knowledge of when the end will come. That Jesus makes a distinction between Himself (God the Son), and God the Father is remarkable. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the lynchpin of the Christian faith. The whole New Testament asserts that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Nonetheless, they are not three separate Gods, but One God in Three Persons. The One Eternal and Infinite Divine Being (the Godhead - Deut. 6:4) exists in Three Eternal and Infinite Persons, or seats of consciousness. The Scriptures testify to the truth of this tenet. *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* (Matthew 28:19; see also John 1:1, 18; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2; et al.)

Some pseudo-Christian cults argue that the Trinity is illogical, or teach that only the Father (Jehovah) is God and Jesus is a lesser created god. Theologians for centuries have tried to explain the Trinity in logical and rational terms. But the Creator God is transcendent, meaning He exists beyond the universe of time, space, matter, and energy. Nor is He subject to human logic or reason.

God the Son stepped out of eternity to be born as a man to pay the penalty for mankind's sin. In so doing, He temporarily left behind His eternal and infinite being. Paul makes this theological principle clear. Jesus, he says, *"who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead, He emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when He had come as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death - even to death on a cross."* (Phil 2:6-8)

Jesus, having established that no human, angel, or even He Himself, knows when the end will come, now further magnifies the unpredictability in verses 37 and 38. He compares it to *"the days of Noah."* *"The days of Noah"* refers to the state of humanity before the time of Noah and the flood. (Gen. 6) People went through the motions of life willfully ignorant of the coming judgment. Jesus used that ancient situation to illustrate the unpredictability and lack of preparation of the world for His return. But notice, Jesus does not focus extensively on the people's wickedness in Noah's day. Instead, He says the pre-flood inhabitants of the earth were simply going about their ordinary tasks in life. They were having feasts and parties.

They were also “*marrying and giving in marriage*.” Every human culture has rituals for establishing families. In many societies, maybe most in history, the families arrange marriages without the man’s or woman’s consent. In most modern cultures, who a person marries is the couple’s choice. In any case, this is the norm for life in just about every era. It was true in Noah’s day. It was true when Jesus spoke to His disciples. It is still true today. The illustration’s key point is that the people of Noah’s time did not know what was coming “*until the day that Noah entered the ark*.” Noah probably told them why he was building the boat. Peter says, Noah, “*a preacher of righteousness*,” tried to warn of the impending danger. (2 Pet. 2:5) They chose to ignore him and go on with their regular (and wicked) lives. (Gen. 6:5) The question begging to be asked is, “Were they any worse than is the world today?”

The people in Noah’s day apparently never got it. They probably scorned and laughed at him. Anyway, they remained happily oblivious until it was too late and judgment fell. Jesus, in verse 39, says “*the flood came and took them all away*.” Jesus probably did not say that line with any sense of satisfaction. God loved the lost people of Noah’s era and certainly grieved over their destruction. Tragically, so many people without God, in whatever time, choose to disregard the heartfelt pleas of God’s preachers to repent and be saved. Some mistakenly think they can wait to get right with God. The problem is, no one knows, to borrow a phrase, “the day or the hour” of his death.

So, Jesus warns that, in the same unexpected way that the flood happened, no one can be sure when the end will or will not come. All we know is that it will be when we least expect it (v. 24:44). When He comes, there will only be two categories of humanity: those who are prepared, by making Jesus their Lord and Savior, and those unprepared who chose otherwise.

The Lord finishes this part of his talk in verse 40 with two dramatic images to illustrate his principle of readiness. First, “*there will be two men in the field*.” Nothing unusual about that. In that agricultural society most able bodied men worked as farmers and herdsman. Maybe Jesus and the disciples were watching some laborers toiling as they sat there on the mountain. But, as the men in the hypothetical story work, suddenly “*one will be taken and one will be left*.”

Jesus then switches the image to two women in verse 41. Like the men, they are hard at work with their daily chores. A hand mill was operated by two women standing opposite each other while pushing and pulling the grind stone back and forth to make meal for bread. Like the men, “*one will be taken and one will be left*.”

Jesus does not say the social statuses of the men or the women. They may have even been slaves. The nature of the work and their social standing was immaterial to His point. Everything about the pairs was the same except for one key variable: their spiritual conditions. It also is unclear who are the saved ones and who are the lost in Jesus’ illustrations. Some interpreters assume this is a description of the rapture wherein saved people then living will be taken out of the world before the tribulation and the lost will be left behind. Other interpreters read it quite differently. They see the ones “*taken*” as being swept away to face divine judgment (like those taken away in the flood in verse 39) and those left will stay with Christ. The point is, in either case, the Lord will return, and some will be ready and others will not.

The key point in this passage is that we do not know when Christ will return. Nonetheless, before He does, God will provide indicators that it is near. We must keep our eyes and ears open for He could come in our lifetimes. In any case, we have to trust in God’s Word. The Bible and Jesus’ words are the bases for knowing He will, return at some future time. We can trust Him to keep His word knowing who He is (God the Son) and that He will come again for His people. So while the actual time of Jesus’ appearing is unknown, we must live as if it could happen each and every day. Remember, He will come when people do not expect it. Meanwhile, we are to live for Christ, demonstrate God’s love, and share the Gospel with those around us who are lost – for when He comes it will not be a joyous time for them.

In the next fifth, and final, installment in this series we will conclude our study of Jesus’ teachings on the end times in Matthew 24:42-51. It is my hope that this study is providing you a balanced and biblically sound approach to this important subject.

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