



session 12 group study guide

the second coming

message

From Jesus' ascension to today, people have tried to predict when Jesus' second coming will take place. Jesus Himself spoke very little about the end times; however, His words in Matthew 24:1-31 are one of those rare exceptions. In this passage, the disciples ask Jesus to tell them when and what to expect in the last days. As you read Jesus' response, consider these questions: (1) How does Jesus describe the end times? (2) What kinds of events does Jesus warn are *not* signs of the end times?

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

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?"

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. 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. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 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.

"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—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. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. 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. For as lightning that comes from the east and is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

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.’

“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. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Matthew 24:1-31).

dig

This great passage of Scripture focuses on the teachings of Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming. Jesus’ words remind us that the true issue is not the “hows” or “whens” of the second coming, but rather in learning to live in the present in the light of the future events.¹

1. Throughout history people have set dates for Christ’s return and been mistaken. What events did Jesus warn the disciples might deceive them into thinking the end was at hand?

2. Before the end comes, what dangers will believers face, and how are we to handle them?

3. How will we be able to distinguish the false Christ from the true Christ?

4. Read Matthew 24:32-51. What do these verses say about the timing of Christ's return?

apply

This important teaching of Jesus helps us look at His second coming in the light of three key words: (1) preparedness, (2) watchfulness and (3) faithfulness. You may not be able to figure out all that you would like to know about Christ's return, but these are steps you can take to prepare for it.

preparedness

1. How do the parables of the thief and the wise and wicked servants (see Matthew 24:42-51) emphasize the importance of living in the light of Christ's return?

2. Why should we prepare *now* for Christ's return?

3. What does being prepared for Christ's coming actually mean to you?

4. The following passages describe six ways to prepare for the second coming of Christ. Share what each verse reveals about how we can prepare for His return.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Isaiah 40:29-31

Micah 6:8

Matthew 16:24

Luke 10:27

Romans 12:1-2

watchfulness

Theologian William Barclay once noted the following about being watchful: “To live without watchfulness invites disaster. A thief does not send a letter saying when he is going to burgle a house; his principal weapon in his nefarious undertakings is surprise; therefore a householder who has valuables in his house must maintain a constant guard. But to get this picture right, we must remember that the watchdog of the Christian for the coming of Christ is not that of terror-stricken fear and shivering apprehension: it is the watching of eager expectation for the coming of glory and joy.”²

1. What does it mean in practical terms to have an attitude of watchfulness?

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. What advice does Paul give Christians on how to be watchful for the coming of Christ?

3. Are you living a life that is prepared and watchful for the second coming? If not, what do you need to change?

faithfulness

Faithfulness is one of the key ingredients in living a consistent Christian life. The Scripture tells us that the rewards of faithfulness are great.

1. Read Matthew 24:45-51. What is the reward for the following servants in this parable?

The faithful servant

The unfaithful servant

2. What does “being faithful” really mean?

3. On the scale below, how would you rank your general level of faithfulness to God?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Never			Sometimes				Always		
faithful			faithful				faithful		

4. In what areas is it easiest for you to be faithful? In what areas is it hardest?

reflect

1. How do you view the second coming of Jesus Christ? With fear? With excitement? With doubt? With indifference? With hope? What are your greatest fears about the future?

2. Why is there so much interest in the second coming?

3. What changes can you make to be more prepared, more watchful and more faithful for Jesus' second coming?

4. Do you think the world is ready for Jesus' return? Why or why not?

meditation



Heaven and earth will pass away,
but my words will never pass away.

MATTHEW 24:35

Notes

1. Some of the questions in this section are adapted from an excellent workbook by Stephen and Jacalyn Eyre, *Matthew: Being Discipled by Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), pp. 65-66.
2. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. II, The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 317.