

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 29: The Olivet Discourse: Signs of the End

Matthew 24:1-35

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Matthew 24 is among the most misread chapters in the Bible, so your most important task as a teacher is to help students read it carefully and rightly. What is doctrinally at stake is the difference between Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and His one final, visible return at the end of the age. Much of this chapter, from verse 4 through verse 35, describes the events leading up to and including the fall of Jerusalem, which Jesus says would occur within that very generation (v. 34) and which history records happened in AD 70. The apocalyptic language of darkened sun and the Son of Man coming on the clouds (vv. 29-30) is the kind of imagery the Old Testament prophets regularly used for God's judgments on nations, not necessarily a description of the end of the world. Beginning at verse 36 (next lesson), Jesus turns to His final coming, of which no one knows the day or hour.

Guard your class against several errors. Do not turn the signs of this chapter into a checklist for predicting the second coming or the end of the world; Jesus gave these signs precisely so His disciples could escape the fall of Jerusalem, and He warned repeatedly against being led astray. Reject date-setting, premillennialism, and any notion of a secret rapture. The Bible teaches one personal, glorious return of Christ, followed by resurrection and judgment, with no preliminary earthly thousand-year political reign. Christ is reigning now; the next great event on God's calendar is His final coming.

Beyond the careful interpretation, this chapter forms hearts. Jesus calls His people not to speculation but to readiness, endurance, discernment, and confidence in His word. Because His prophecy about Jerusalem came true to the letter, we can stake our lives on His promises about what is still ahead. Aim to send students home both equipped to read the chapter soundly and stirred to stay awake, keep their love from growing cold, and take Jesus at His word.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus foretells that the temple will be completely destroyed, not one stone left on another (vv. 1-2). How does the precise fulfillment of this prediction in AD 70 strengthen our confidence in everything else Jesus says about the future?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the sheer specificity of Jesus' prediction. The temple was an immense, seemingly permanent structure, the pride of the nation and the center of its worship. Jesus says it will be

so completely destroyed that not one stone will be left upon another (v. 2). To His hearers this would have sounded almost unthinkable.

Then point to history. In AD 70, after a Jewish revolt, the Roman general Titus besieged Jerusalem, broke through its walls, and destroyed the temple. Ancient accounts describe the stones being thrown down and the site left in ruins. Jesus' words were fulfilled within about forty years, in the lifetime of many who heard Him.

Draw the lesson for faith. A prophet is tested by whether his words come true (Deuteronomy 18:22). Jesus passed that test in the most public way imaginable. The precise fulfillment of His prophecy about Jerusalem is a powerful reason to trust everything else He says, including His promises about His final return, the resurrection, and the judgment.

Help students feel the steadiness this gives. We do not follow a Lord who guessed about the future. We follow One whose word has already proven reliable in history. That should anchor us against both fear and skepticism.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reliability of Jesus' word, proven by the fulfilled prophecy of Jerusalem's fall (vv. 1-2)
- Fulfilled prophecy as a ground of confidence in Christ's other promises
- The historical destruction of the temple in AD 70 as the fulfillment Jesus foretold
- Trusting Christ's promises about the future because His past words came true

Discussion Prompts

- How does the fulfillment of this prophecy strengthen your trust in Jesus?
- Why is it significant that this happened within that generation?
- What promise of Jesus about the future do you most need to trust right now?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus repeatedly warns, "See that no one leads you astray" (vv. 4-5, 11, 23-26). Where are you most vulnerable to being deceived or alarmed by false teaching, sensational claims, or fear about the future?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus' first and most repeated command in this chapter is not about signs but about discernment: "See that no one leads you astray" (vv. 4-5). He warns of false christs, false prophets, and alarming reports, and tells His followers not to be deceived or frightened. This is the first self-examining question, so make it personal.

Notice how relevant this is. In every generation, including ours, there are voices eager to use fear of the future to manipulate, to sell predictions, to claim special knowledge, or to lead people away from the simple gospel. Jesus says, in effect, do not fall for it.

Help students identify their own vulnerabilities. Some are drawn to sensational end-times speculation. Some are easily alarmed by every crisis and headline. Some are pulled by charismatic teachers who claim new revelations. The antidote is a settled grounding in Scripture and a calm trust in Christ.

Point to the remedy. We are protected from deception not mainly by knowing more predictions but by knowing the Lord and His word well. A believer steeped in Scripture, walking closely with Christ, and rooted in a faithful church is far harder to lead astray.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' central warning against being deceived (vv. 4–5, 23–26)
- The danger of fear and sensationalism about the future
- Grounding in Scripture as the protection against deception (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- Calm trust in Christ rather than alarm at every crisis

Discussion Prompts

- What kinds of claims about the future most tempt or alarm you?
- How does knowing Scripture protect you from being led astray?
- What helps you stay calm and grounded when the world feels chaotic?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus describes wars, famines, false christs, and persecution as the birth pains leading up to Jerusalem's fall, yet says "the end is not yet" (vv. 6–8). Why is it a mistake to treat ordinary calamities and rumors as proof that the final end has arrived?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus lists wars, rumors of wars, famines, and earthquakes, and then says something crucial: "the end is not yet" and "all these are but the beginning of the birth pains" (vv. 6–8). He explicitly tells His disciples not to read ordinary calamities as proof that the end has arrived.

This is a vital corrective. In every age people have pointed to current wars and disasters as sure signs that the end is upon us. Jesus, who knew the future perfectly, said the opposite: these things will happen, and they do not mean the end is here. They were the birth pains leading toward Jerusalem's fall, and in a broader sense they characterize the whole age.

Explain the danger of treating calamities as a countdown. It produces fear, fuels false predictions, and distracts from the work Christ actually gave us. Every failed end-times prediction in history has ignored Jesus' clear warning here.

Redirect to faithfulness. Instead of decoding the news for hidden signs, the disciple is called to endure, to keep serving, and to keep proclaiming the gospel. Calamities should drive us not to speculation but to readiness and compassion.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Wars and disasters as ongoing features of this age, not proof the end has come (vv. 6–8)
- Jesus' explicit warning against reading calamities as a countdown
- The failure and danger of date-setting predictions
- Faithfulness and gospel work as the right response to a troubled world

Discussion Prompts

- Why do people so often treat current disasters as signs of the end?
- How does Jesus' teaching here free you from fear of the headlines?
- What should calamities in the world drive us toward instead of speculation?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus says that because lawlessness increases, “the love of many will grow cold,” but “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (vv. 12–13). Where do you feel your own love for Christ in danger of cooling, and what would endurance look like for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus gives a sober warning: as lawlessness increases, “the love of many will grow cold” (v. 12). Then He adds a promise: “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (v. 13). This is the heart of the chapter's call to perseverance, and a deeply personal question.

Notice what threatens love here. It is not primarily persecution from outside but the corroding effect of lawlessness, sin, and pressure over time. Love can cool slowly, almost imperceptibly, until the fire that once burned bright is only embers.

Help students examine their own hearts honestly. Is their love for Christ warmer or cooler than it was a year ago? What has been cooling it: busyness, disappointment, sin, neglect of prayer and the word, the slow drift of comfort? This is the place for honest reflection, not condemnation.

Hold the warning and promise together. Jesus' words assume that a believer's love can grow cold and that endurance is necessary; this is consistent with the New Testament's call to remain

faithful and its warnings against falling away (Hebrews 3:12–14). Endurance is not earning salvation; it is the persevering faith through which God keeps us. Encourage practical steps to rekindle love: returning to the word, to prayer, to the assembly, to active service.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The real danger of love for Christ growing cold (v. 12)
- The necessity of enduring to the end (v. 13; Hebrews 3:12–14)
- Perseverance as the persevering faith through which God keeps us, not self-earned merit
- Practical means of rekindling love for Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Is your love for Christ warmer or cooler than it was a year ago?
- What tends to cool your love for the Lord over time?
- What is one concrete way you could rekindle that love this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus tells His disciples that when they see the signs around Jerusalem they must flee without delay (vv. 15–20). What does this practical, urgent warning show us about God’s care to protect and prepare His people before judgment falls?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus gives intensely practical instructions: when you see the abomination of desolation and the signs around Jerusalem, flee to the mountains, do not go back for your things, pray that your flight not be in winter or on a Sabbath (vv. 15–20). Luke’s parallel makes the meaning plain: “when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near” (Luke 21:20).

Highlight God’s care here. Jesus is not giving these signs so His people can calculate the end of the world; He is giving them so His people can escape a real, historical catastrophe. Early Christians, remembering His words, are reported to have fled the city before the Roman siege closed in, and so were spared.

Draw the broader lesson. Throughout Scripture, before judgment falls, God warns and provides a way of escape for His people: Noah and the ark, Lot and Sodom, and here the disciples and Jerusalem. God is not capricious; He is a God who warns in mercy and protects His own.

Apply it to confidence in God’s character. The same God who lovingly prepared His people for AD 70 is the God who has warned us about the final judgment and provided the way of escape in Christ. His warnings are always acts of mercy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' signs given to protect His people from the fall of Jerusalem (vv. 15–20; Luke 21:20)
- God's pattern of warning and providing escape before judgment (Genesis 7; 19)
- The mercy of God in His warnings
- Christ as the way of escape from the final judgment

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's care to warn His people show you about His character?
- How is every warning in Scripture an act of mercy?
- How does Christ provide our way of escape from the judgment to come?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus says the gospel will be "proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" before the end comes (v. 14). How does the spread of the gospel in your own life and circles fit into God's larger purpose, and where might He be calling you to take part?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In the midst of the warnings comes a hopeful, expansive word: "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (v. 14). Even before Jerusalem fell, the gospel had spread remarkably across the Roman world (Colossians 1:6, 23). God's saving purpose advances even in turbulent times.

Use this to lift students' eyes from fear to mission. The story God is writing is not mainly about decoding disasters; it is about the gospel reaching the nations. Every believer has a part in that great purpose, in their own circles of family, friendship, work, and neighborhood.

Make it concrete and personal. Ask where God has placed each student as a witness. Who in their life has not yet heard the gospel clearly? What would it look like to take part in the testimony going to all nations, whether by speaking, supporting, praying, or going?

Connect mission to readiness. The way to be ready for the Lord's coming is not to retreat into a bunker of speculation but to be found doing the work He gave us, including making His good news known.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The spread of the gospel to all nations as part of God's purpose (v. 14; Colossians 1:6, 23)
- Mission as the believer's calling in every age
- Every Christian's part in the testimony going to the nations
- Active gospel witness as a form of readiness for Christ's coming

Discussion Prompts

- Where has God placed you as a witness to the gospel?
- Who in your life has not yet clearly heard the good news?
- What is one way you could take part in the gospel reaching others?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus uses dramatic language of the sun darkened and the Son of Man coming on the clouds (vv. 29–30), the same kind of imagery the prophets used for God's judgments on nations. How does understanding this Old Testament way of speaking help us read this passage rightly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus describes the sun darkened, the moon not giving light, the stars falling, and the Son of Man coming on the clouds (vv. 29–30). Many assume this must describe the literal end of the world, but this is exactly where careful reading matters. This is the language the Old Testament prophets used repeatedly for God's judgments on nations within history.

Give examples. Isaiah describes the fall of Babylon with the sun darkened and the stars not giving light (Isaiah 13:10). Ezekiel describes God's judgment on Egypt by covering the heavens and darkening the stars (Ezekiel 32:7–8). This is poetic, apocalyptic imagery for the shaking of nations and the fall of powers, not a literal description of the cosmos ending.

Apply it to this passage. When Jesus uses this same imagery in the context of Jerusalem's fall, He is announcing, in the prophets' own language, that God is bringing a great judgment, and that the Son of Man is being vindicated and enthroned as the one with authority. The coming on the clouds here echoes Daniel 7, where the Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom, not down to earth.

Help students see why this matters. Reading apocalyptic imagery woodenly has led to endless confusion and false predictions. Reading it the way the prophets used it keeps us from mistaking a judgment on a city for the end of the world, and prepares us to distinguish this section from the final coming Jesus describes beginning in verse 36.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Old Testament apocalyptic imagery for God's judgments on nations (Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7–8)
- The darkened sun and Son of Man on the clouds as judgment and vindication language (vv. 29–30; Daniel 7:13–14)
- The danger of reading apocalyptic imagery woodenly
- Distinguishing the judgment on Jerusalem from the final coming

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing how the prophets used this imagery change your reading?
- Why is it important not to read apocalyptic language woodenly?
- How does Daniel 7 help us understand the Son of Man coming on the clouds?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus says to learn the lesson of the fig tree: when you see these things, know that it is near (vv. 32–33). What in your life tends to make you spiritually drowsy, and how can you stay alert and discerning instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus gives the parable of the fig tree: when its branch becomes tender and puts out leaves, you know summer is near; so when you see all these things, you know that it is near, at the very gates (vv. 32–33). The signs He gave were meant to be readable by that generation as the fall of Jerusalem approached.

Turn this toward the heart with the theme of alertness. The opposite of readiness is spiritual drowsiness, the dull, distracted state in which we stop paying attention to God and the things that matter most. This is the self-examining question, so make it concrete.

Help students name what makes them drowsy: overbusyness, entertainment, comfort, the numbing routine of life, neglect of prayer and the word. Spiritual drowsiness rarely announces itself; it just slowly settles in until we are going through the motions.

Point to wakefulness. Staying alert means cultivating regular habits of attention to God, honest self-examination, and engagement with His people. Encourage one concrete practice that helps the student stay spiritually awake and discerning.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to read the times with discernment (vv. 32–33)
- Spiritual drowsiness as the enemy of readiness
- Habits of attention to God as the path to alertness
- Self-examination and engagement with God's people as means of staying awake

Discussion Prompts

- What tends to make you spiritually drowsy?
- How can you tell when you are just going through the motions?
- What is one practice that helps you stay spiritually alert?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus declares, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (v. 34). How does this statement help us tell the difference between what Jesus said would happen to Jerusalem within that generation and His one final return, and why does this guard us against date-setting and false predictions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and it is the interpretive key to the whole chapter, so teach it carefully and confidently. Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (v. 34). The plain meaning is that the things He had just described, the signs, the tribulation, the fall of Jerusalem, would occur within the lifetime of that generation. And they did, in AD 70.

Use this statement to make the crucial distinction. From verse 4 through verse 35, Jesus is largely answering the disciples’ question about the destruction of the temple and the events surrounding it, all of which He says would happen within that generation. Beginning at verse 36 (the focus of the next lesson), He shifts to His final coming, about which He says no one knows the day or hour, not even the angels, not even the Son. The contrast is sharp: things that would happen soon and with warning signs, versus a day that will come without warning and at an unknown time.

Show why this distinction guards us against serious error. People who blur these two together end up doing exactly what Jesus warned against: reading the signs of AD 70 as a checklist for predicting the second coming, setting dates, and being repeatedly proven wrong. When we recognize that the signs belonged to that generation and the final coming has no signs and no known date, we are freed from date-setting altogether.

Address the major false systems plainly but graciously. There is no biblical basis here for a secret rapture, a seven-year tribulation timetable, or an earthly thousand-year political reign of Christ. The Scriptures teach one personal, visible, glorious return of Christ at an unknown time, followed by the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment (John 5:28–29; Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; 2 Peter 3:10). Christ is reigning now, and the next great event is that one final coming.

End with the anchor of verse 35: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Jesus’ words about Jerusalem came true exactly. That is our assurance that His words about His final return are equally certain. We do not need to know the date. We need to be ready, because the One who never failed a prophecy has promised He will come.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “This generation” pointing to the fulfillment of vv. 4–35 within that lifetime, in AD 70 (v. 34)
- The shift at verse 36 to the final coming, of unknown day and hour
- The distinction between near events with signs and the final coming without signs
- Rejection of date-setting, premillennialism, a secret rapture, and a seven-year tribulation scheme
- One personal, visible return of Christ followed by resurrection and judgment (Acts 1:11; John 5:28–29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)
- The absolute reliability of Christ’s word as our assurance (v. 35)

Discussion Prompts

- How does verse 34 help us tell apart the fall of Jerusalem and the final coming?
- Why does this distinction free us from date-setting and false predictions?
- How does the exact fulfillment of Jesus’ words give you confidence about His final return?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the whole chapter, Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (v. 35). Name one specific way you will take Jesus more fully at His word and live more ready this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use the capstone to land the chapter where Jesus lands it: on the absolute trustworthiness of His word. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (v. 35). Everything we can see, the most solid and permanent things in our world, will one day be gone, but the words of Jesus will still stand.

Invite students to respond personally. The right response to this chapter is not to become an amateur prophecy expert but to take Jesus at His word and live ready. Ask each person where they most need to trust His word and align their lives with it.

Press for one specific step. It might be laying down a fear about the future, refusing to chase end-times speculation, rekindling a cooling love, taking part in the gospel going out, or simply living each day as one who answers to a returning Lord.

Close in worship and confidence. We do not face the future with anxiety or with the false certainty of date-setters. We face it with the calm assurance of people whose Lord has already proven His word true and who has promised to come again. Lead your class to trust Him and to stay ready.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The permanence and reliability of Jesus’ words above all created things (v. 35)

- Readiness and trust as the right response to prophecy
- Concrete, specific obedience as the fruit of taking Jesus at His word
- Calm confidence rather than anxiety or speculation about the future

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most need to take Jesus at His word right now?
- What is one specific way you will live more ready this week?
- How can this class encourage one another to stay faithful and watchful?