

## Characteristics of the End of the Age (Matthew 24:9-14)

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### Mat. 24:3-14

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."<sup>1</sup>

### Previous times in Matthew 24

- Mat. 24:1-2, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple (first presentation).
  - Divine judgment upon the Jews having rejected their prophesied king.
  - A *bona fide* offer of a king to Israel in fulfillment of the promises of a ruler on the throne of David.
  - Postponement of Messianic kingdom: the continuation of the Times of the Gentiles which began earlier with overthrow of the last king to sit on the throne of David at the time of the Babylonian overthrow and captivity in 586 B.C.
- The disciples ask by which sign they might know:
  1. The destruction of the Jewish Temple
  2. Your coming and the end of the age

Mat. 24:3-8, Jesus gives *three sure signs* (previous presentation), one now past and two yet future

1. Luke: "when you see . . . Jerusalem surrounded by armies". The destruction of

- Jerusalem and the Temple by Titus of Rome in A.D. 70.
2. Matthew and Mark: “when you see . . . the Abomination of Desolation” standing in the holy place, where it ought not to be - yet future
  3. Matthew, Mark, and Luke: the sign of the Son of Man in heaven which will be global and unmistakable, marking the unambiguous return of Jesus

Jesus also warned against deception:

- Don’t interpret the general characteristics of the interadvent age (wars, rumors of wars, false Messiahs, famines, pestilences, earthquakes) as an indication that the end has come.
- These are just the “beginning of sorrows” or *birth pangs* - the much more intense time of “delivery” is yet to come.
- Don’t be “Christian Littles” running around crying “the sky is falling!”

## **Characteristics of the End of the Age (Mat. 24:9-14)**

### **1. Sequence of presentation**

Do these verses pertain to the beginning of sorrows, the interadvent age within which we presently find ourselves? Or do they pertain to the time of the end (after the second sure sign)?

#### **A. The Time of the End**

I believe verses 9-14 pertain primarily to the time of the end.<sup>2</sup>

1. The grammar of the passage implies the passage concerns the time of the end:
  - The word *then* (*τότε* [tote]) which introduces verses 9, 10, and 11, indicates sequence. The things Jesus describes in these verses most naturally follow upon the “beginning of sorrows” in verse 8.<sup>3</sup>
  - A final *then* in verse 14 closes the sequence, “*then* the end will come.”
  - The characteristics described in verses 9-14 are sandwiched between the “beginning of sorrows” and “the end” of the age.
  - The following section (vv. 15-22) is linked to this section by the word *therefore*. It is *because* of the dangerous characteristics of the end of the age that Jesus then moves on to give explicit instructions concerning the safety of those living in Judea when the end of the age is unambiguously signified by the “abomination of desolation” -- the “second sure sign.”
2. Love grown cold due to a marked global increase in lawlessness. This is not a continual trend throughout church history, but a specific

- characteristic of the end.
3. The gospel message emphasizes “the kingdom” which seems to have in view the expected arrival of the millennial kingdom upon the return of Christ to take up the throne of David.
  4. Persecution is simultaneously global. As the church father Origin observed, “when the things foretold by Christ shall have come to pass, then there shall be persecutions, not as before in places, but every where against the people of God.”<sup>4</sup>
  5. Although examples of many of the characteristics mentioned in this passage can be found throughout church history, not with the global focus and intensity described here. <sup>5 6 7</sup>
  6. The global accomplishment of the gospel presentation, just as prophesied in Revelation 14:6, the context of which places it within the final seven years.
  7. Scripture predicts an apostasy at the time of the end which is both specific and intense (2Th. 2:3; 1Ti. 4:1).<sup>8</sup> “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons . . .” (1Ti. 4:1)
  8. The persecution of believers described during this time includes *betrayal among professing Christians* indicating a time of great motivation to defect and turn on one another.
  9. In Mat. 24:13 the phrase, “he who endures to the end”, when viewed in light of the original questions of the disciples, would seem to primarily have in view *the end of the age*.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Secondary Signs of the End of the Age

The characteristics of verses 9-14 serve as *secondary* signs of the end of the age.

1. Global persecution of Christians
2. Great spiritual deception
3. Loss of trust
4. Global proclamation of the gospel

## Persecution

“Then they will deliver *you* up to tribulation and kill *you*, and *you* will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.” (v. 9)

### 1. A word about the prophetic use of “you”

Some who oppose a futuristic interpretation of certain passages often make the claim that certain words or phrases in a prophetic passage *demand* a near

fulfillment in the lifetime of the immediate recipients of the message. We'll see this when we consider the meaning of the phrase "this generation" in verse 24 (Matthew 24:34). In the passage before us, the question arises as to whom Jesus is referring to in His use of the 2nd person pronoun "you"? Is it required that the things described in the passage apply to His disciples within their lifetimes?<sup>10</sup> Fortunately, we have numerous examples from elsewhere in Scripture that "you" can go far beyond the initial recipients of the message to take in those many generations later who also have ears to hear the message preserved to their times:

- "The LORD your God will raise up for **you** a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear..." (Deu. 18:15)
- "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon **you**, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you..." (Deu. 30:1)
- "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south. Then **you** shall flee through My mountain valley, For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, **you** shall flee as you fled from the earthquake In the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You." (Zec. 14:4-5)

## 2. The World vs. Christ

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake." (v. 9)

- "Then, *they [plural] will deliver you*"... Who? The people of all the nations! "You will be hated by all nations"
- The Scriptures teach a sobering reality: there are only two kingdoms--there is no middle ground. Each individual is either in Christ or opposed to Christ. Moreover, there is an uncanny allegiance among those whose main point of commonality is their rejection of Jesus. Unbelievers who otherwise are opposed to one another on numerous grounds quickly unite in their opposition of Christ and those which are His.
  - Jesus, when speaking to His unbelieving brothers, put it this way: "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. **The world cannot hate you**, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil." (Jn 7:6-7)
  - In the upper room on the night of his betrayal, Jesus warned (John

15:18-24):

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. *If you were of the world, the world would love its own.* Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you *for My name's sake*, because they do not know Him who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father.<sup>11</sup>

- We will only be hated if we are not of the world: *the world loves its own!* (The lukewarm church of Revelation.)
- Hated because we are chosen out of the world: {i anything and everything God chooses you can count on the world to hate!}
- "for My name's sake"
  - Because of our identification with Him
  - Only because we represent Him and remind them of His righteous requirements and the coming judgment.
- The things done to Christians are motivated by an intense hatred for Christ and all that He represents.
- Our witness means there no longer remains any excuse: God-rejectors may play games of misrepresentation, but at the core of their being there is a knowingly rebellious heart which refuses to submit to God (Rom. 1:18-20).
- The "transitive property of hatred": Hatred toward us = hatred toward Christ. Hatred toward Christ = hatred of God the Father. Therefore, the hatred Christians experience *in His Name* is a hatred of God -- which can be *extremely severe!*
  - God is inaccessible, we remain accessible in His stead.
    - Consider the actions of the Antichrist described in Revelation 13, "Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation." (Re 13:6-7)
    - The fury of the Antichrist is motivated against God, *His name, His tabernacle* and *those who dwell in heaven*.

- They being beyond his influence, he instead pours out his wrath on Christians across the globe.
- This hatred is demonically empowered and reaches a level of intensity and perversity that amplifies the already existing human capacity for sin.
- It is the very wrath of Satan extended through those who are His toward those who are Christ's.
- History already provides a fearful witness of the intensity of this hatred of all things God:

... wheels ... were ... used ... for the torturing of faithful Christians, around the circumference whereof they would very often fix sharp nails and the like, in such wise that their points being turned upward might project beyond the rims. Then on the wheels thus arranged they would bind the Martyrs, whose bodies were pitifully torn by the sharp points of the spikes, as well as by others which stood planted in the earth beneath. In the *Acts of St. George* we find narrated as follows: 'Wherefore the Emperor ordered a wheel to be brought in stuck all round with sharp points, and the Saint to be bound naked to the same, and so mangled by the weapons attached thereto. The wheel was hung in the air, while underneath were laid planks, whereon were fixed close together a number of spikes, like sharp swords, some with their points straight upward, others curved like hooks, others resembling flaying knives.'

Accordingly, when the wheel in its revolutions came near the planks, and the Holy Man, bound like a lamb with slender lines and small cords in such wise that these entered into his flesh and were hid therein, was forced, as the wheel turned, to pass over the swords, his body was caught on their keen edges and sorely lacerated, and contorted and torn in pieces as if with the instrument known as a *scorpion*.' So much for this

Saint's death.<sup>12</sup>

- Other accounts which come down to us illustrate the depraved depths to which Christ-haters will go in their service of Satan against God's elect. Books on the subject document torture and death of Christian Martyrs by crosses, stakes, the wheel, pulleys, presses, scourging, iron claws and hooks, red-hot plates, torches, blazing brands, pots, frying pans, cauldrons, iron styles, nails, saws, spears, swords, arrows, tearing out the inwards, beheading, pounding with axes and clubs, cutting off limbs, pulling teeth, pulling apart, flaying alive, exposure to wild beasts and more.
- One shudders to imagine what other devilish innovations have yet been

developed to find employment against the Saints at the time of the end: “. . . Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” (Rev. 12:12)

### 3. Betrayal among Christians

Not only will Christians be hated and persecuted by all nations, they will also be betrayed by those whom they thought were their own.

- “And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.” (Mat. 24:10)
- “Be offended” is *σκανδαλισθήσονται* [skandalisthēsontai], the Greek word from which we get “scandalized.”
- The word can denote the idea of something or someone causing another “to stumble into sin”, or “to fall away”, as translated by the NASB (Mat. 13:21; John 6:61).
- The emphasis upon *one another* in this verse is telling us that a primary means by which Christians will come to their end is by betrayal by fellow Christians.
- “Betray” is *παραδόσουσιν* [paradōsousin] which is the same word worked translated ‘deliver’ in preceding verses. It appears that professing Christians will ‘give over’ true Christians - they will turn them in to authorities for jailing and subsequent death.
- Thus is describing an unparalleled time of danger for believers. As the church father Chrysostom put it, “Having named two sources of opposition, that from seducers, and that from enemies, he adds a third, that from false brethren.”<sup>13</sup>

### 4. The Jewish context

This global hatred of God will find its culmination in the intense persecution of all who are believers in Christ. However, as the greater context of this verse and the book of Revelation make clear, a large contingent of believers at the time of the end will be Jews.

- Jesus' subsequent warning to flee concerns believers who are in *Judea*.
- He says they should pray that their flight would not have to occur during the *Sabbath* when transportation will be difficult.
- Implications of the sheep and goat judgment (Matthew 25:33)
- Jewish connection of the gathering of the elect (Mat. 24:31)
- A time of intense *Jewish* persecution:
  - Called by Jeremiah the time of *Jacob’s* trouble (Jer. 30:7)
  - Concerning this period, Daniel was told: “At that time Michael shall

stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people [the Jews]; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.”  
 (Da 12:1)

- 144,000 protected in Revelation 7 and 14 are Jews
- Clues concerning the identity of the woman in Revelation 12 who flees to the wilderness for protection indicates she is *Israel*.

## 5. The Antidote (Luke 6:22-23)

Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, *for the Son of Man's sake*. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.<sup>14</sup>

## Spiritual deception

“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.” (v. 11)

- Atheism, having been ushered in on the heels of modernism, believes it will banish religious superstition to the dark mists of history.
- On the contrary: atheistic humanism is creating a vacuum which will subsequently be filled, not by God's truth, but by deceptive spiritual alternatives.
- As creatures created by God, we are designed to worship. We have an innate need to worship. Atheism cannot fill this spiritual vacuum.
- How and why will spiritual deception be rampant? Men will experience a continued desire to worship, but it will be coupled with the loss of Biblical truth: both by way of access and lack of proper interpretation.
- This will ultimately culminate in a time of great spiritual darkness and openness to the occult.
- Spiritual hunger coupled with a hatred of God and great Biblical ignorance is a recipe made for deception.
- It is during this time that the ultimate false prophet will arise, the second beast from the earth mentioned by John in Revelation 13:11-17, which says in part, “And he **deceives** those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast . . .”

## Loss of trust

“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” (v. 12)

- Lawlessness itself is costly, but the resulting loss of trust is a much greater cost. [My experience on the mission trip to London.]

- Lawlessness is **πληθυνθῆναι** [plēthynthēnai], “to be multiplied, increase, spread”
- We already see a trend toward lawlessness in our own time due to increasing constraints upon proper authority
  - It is increasingly difficult for parents to discipline their children according to Biblical guidelines.
  - We have long passed the point where school teachers or principles are able to adequately discipline students.
  - More recently, established laws regarding illegal aliens at the state level are being interfered by legal action from the federal government.
- Yet the period described here is to be unique in history. As Paul mentioned to Timothy, “. . . know this, that *in the last days* perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God . . .” (2Ti. 3:1-4)

## Global proclamation of the gospel

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (v. 14)

- This “gospel of the kingdom,” is much the same as the emphasis given by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples at His first advent.
- The common element is the presentation of the kingdom to Israel (e.g., Mat. 3:2; 4:17; 9:35).
- The gospel message will emphasize the soon arrival of the millennial kingdom which follows immediately upon Christ’s return -- ending “the times of the Gentiles” mentioned by Jesus in Luke 21:24 which spans the interadvent period.
- It appears that this gospel of the kingdom will likely be preached, in part, by the 144,000 Jews of Revelation 7 and 14 in which case there would be great emphasis on the approaching millennial kingdom in which Scripture indicates Israel is to have a central role (Zec. 14:16-21).<sup>15</sup>
- According to the book of Revelation, the global presentation of the gospel will also occur through angelic assistance:
  - “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people--saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’” (Rev. 14:6-7)
  - The instruction to fear God and the mention of impending judgment is certainly not the seeker-sensitive soft sell often heard today! It would seem that the purpose of the presentation is not entirely redemptive.
  - Notice the gospel is preached to every nation, tribe, tongue and people, *but*

*these are the same nations which are actively seeking out and killing believers!*

- Later in this very chapter, Jesus compares this time to the days before Noah's flood (Mat. 24:38-39). How many responded to Noah's righteous preaching then (1Pe. 3:20; 2Pe. 2:5)?
- Sometimes the gospel witness is to confirm those who hate God in their rejection and remove all possible excuse. <sup>16 17</sup>
- Even so, Scripture indicates there will be a multitude who respond: "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands . . . These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Re 7:9,14)
- This will be a time of intense double witness: 1) the preaching of the gospel by word and, 2) by the faithfulness of *Christian martyrs* ala Polycarp's "good confession."

## Summary

At the time of the end, it appears that trends which have manifested in different places and at different times during the interadvent age will simultaneously climax on a global scale:

1. Unparalleled global hatred and persecution of Christians, especially Jewish Christians.
2. Dramatic rise in lawlessness resulting in the erosion of trust between people.
3. A peak in spiritual deception.
4. The polarization between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light will be more visible than ever before.
5. There will be no room for lukewarm, half-hearted belief as in previous periods: the intense danger associating with professing Christ will see to it!

It is incumbent upon us as believers to get serious about our walk "while it is still day" and to preserve and pass on the Truth of God's Word in every way we can so that those whose destiny it is to live through this sobering period described by Jesus will have every spiritual advantage.

Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Mat. 24:3-14
2. In concert with Luke's emphasis on the near-fulfillment of the destruction of Jerusalem: 1) the parallel passage in Luke 21:12-19 is said to take place, "before all these things" -- prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; 2) prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, Christians would also be hated, betrayed, and persecuted, but Luke makes no mention of

hated on the part of "all nations"; 3) there was not yet a global Christian witness, nor does Luke mention global evangelization as here; 4) the persecution mentioned in Luke emphasizes betrayal by family members and relatives rather than among the professing Christian community.

3. "The occurrences of the adverb translated "then" or "at that time" (**τότε**) in verses nine and ten introduce further description of the end time." [Ref-143](#), 271
4. [Ref-1232](#), Origin, 808
5. "The conditions depicted in verses 9 to 14 fit perfectly with the first half of the unfulfilled seventieth week of Daniel; and therefore it is quite possible that the Rapture should be fitted in between verses 8 and 9. On the other hand, similar conditions have taken place again and again during the so-called Christian centuries, but they will be accentuated in the time of the end." [Ref-1124](#), 316
6. "But the whole passage might be referred to the end of the world." [Ref-1232](#), Remigius, 808
7. "Christ now mentions signs that will fall in the second half of the Tribulation (Mat. 24:9-14)." [Ref-0202](#), 400
8. "Then there will be great apostasy when many shall be stumbled, and faithful servants of God will be betrayed by their closest relatives." [Ref-1124](#), 317
9. Although it almost certainly includes the companion idea of the end of life for those who remain faithful under persecution until death (Luke 21:19).
10. If the answer were to be "yes," then we no longer have any sure signs concerning the return of Jesus and the end of the age -- since they presumably everything here described must necessarily have happened within the lifetime of the disciples!
11. [NKJV](#), Jn 15:18-24
12. [Ref-1269](#), 30-31
13. [Ref-1232](#), Chrysostom, 806
14. [NKJV](#), Lk 6:22-23
15. "the idea of the kingdom, while extending throughout the world, turns our thoughts to the land of Israel. It is "this gospel of the kingdom" which is here spoken of; it is not the proclamation of the union of the Church with Christ, nor redemption in its fullness, as preached and taught by the apostles after the ascension, but the kingdom which was to be established on the earth, as John the Baptist, and as the Lord Himself, had proclaimed." [Ref-0893](#), 172
16. "And the sign of the Lord's second coming is, that the Gospel shall be preached in all the world, so that all may be without excuse." [Ref-1232](#), Jerome, 808
17. "He adds, For a witness unto all nations, in accusation, that is, of such as believe not, they who have believed bearing witness against them that believed not, and condemning them." [Ref-1232](#), Chrysostom, 807

## Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0202** Dwight J. Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981).
- Ref-0893** John N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Bible, Volumes 1-5* (New York, NY: Loizeaux Brothers, 1950).
- Ref-1124** Ironside, H. A., *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1948).
- Ref-1232** Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels collected out of the Works of the Fathers - Vol. 1 Part 1, 2 and 3, St. Matthew* (Oxford, England: J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1841).
- Ref-1269** Antonio Gallonio, *Torture: Torments of the Christian Martyrs* (New York, NY: Walden Publications, 1939).

## Links Mentioned Above

a - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.