

The Sign of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:23-30)

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The Context of Matthew 24

- Jesus is responding to questions posed by the disciples in verse 3 concerning three events yet future to their day
 1. The destruction of the Jewish temple
 2. The sign of his coming
 3. And of the end of the age
- Jesus responded in verses 4-8 by describing general characteristics of the inter-advent age, and emphasized that these were not reliable indicators of His coming or the end of the age. Jesus calls this period, “the beginning of sorrows.”
- In verses 9-11, Jesus describes what conditions will be like at the end of the age
- In verses 15-22, Jesus tells us the sure sign of the end of the age: *the Abomination of Desolation*, which has relevance for all Jews and Christians, especially those living in Israel at that time.
 - It is this event which marks the arrival of the end of the age and triggers a historically unique period of global persecution and danger.
- In the verses before us, Jesus now addresses the question, “what will be the sign of your coming.”

Mat. 24:23-30

Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.¹

Three sessions to cover the concepts introduced in this passage

- Today: Jesus' warning concerning deception and the sign of the Son of Man (Mat.

24:23-27,30)

- Next time: signs in the heavens and the gathering of the elect (Mat. 24:29-31)
- Later still: Jesus' comment concerning eagles (or vultures) and carcasses (Mat. 24:28)

Deception

1. Verse 24: “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders”

A. The Christ

- When we discussed verses 3-8, where Jesus stated that false christs would characterize the entire interadvent age, we saw the development of a widespread expectation of a coming “Messiah” -- a global savior figure.
- As we saw, a number of religious systems and world views expect the rise of this global savior figure, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Theosophy, among others.
- These expectations, which reject the true Messiah, Jesus, will pave the way for increasingly deceptive false christs and prophets who Jesus states will populate the end of the age.

B. Miraculous signs and wonders

- What will be the purpose of these signs? *to deceive*
- Will the signs and wonders be false -- simply ploys or tricks? In what way will they be deceptive?
- I believe Scripture indicates that the signs and wonders will be *legitimate miracles*, but *whom or what they point to or authorize* is false -- not of God.
- In your Christian life, underscore this principle: all that is miraculous is not necessarily of God! Consider this principle when evaluating the “signs and wonders movement.”
- There are spiritual forces of wickedness behind the scenes which are allowed, the Scriptures say even *granted*, to perform deceptive signs.
- This is all part of the difficult reality that although God is not the author of evil, even evil must serve His ultimate purposes -- often by bringing judgment upon those who reject Him or refuse to live according to His principles.

C. Greater deception coming

- The false christs and prophets Jesus mentions here will be much more convincing than false messiahs and prophets the world has seen to

date.

- Two in particular are highlighted in prophetic passages concerning the end of the age. We know them as “the Beast” (Rev. 13:1-4) or “Antichrist” (1Jn. 2:18) and the “False Prophet” (Rev. 13:11-17).
- Time prevents a detailed consideration of the deceptive works of these two individuals, but clearly they are two of the individuals which Jesus has in mind here.

I. The deceptive False Prophet

- The false prophet is introduced in Revelation 13 with these words, “. . . he had two horns *like a lamb*, but spoke *like a dragon*” (Rev. 13:11).
- Already we see *deception* as one of his key attributes: he *appears* one way, but his *spoken agenda* is something quite different!
- He causes those who dwell on the earth to worship the first beast, the Antichrist. Notice: the individual which he *points to* is a fraud.
- “He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.” (Rev. 13:13).
- “And he *deceives* those who dwell on the earth *by those signs . . .*” (Rev. 13:14).
- I believe Scripture indicates that the signs he performs are *real* but the authority which derives from the signs are used to *point to* falsehood.

II. The deceptive Beast, the Antichrist

- The Beast, or Antichrist, is also deceptive to the core.
- Like his predecessor, Antiochus Epiphanes IV whom we spoke of last time, his rise involves intrigue and deception: “Through his cunning He shall cause *deceit to prosper under his rule*; And he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity [or by peace]. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; But he shall be broken without human means” (Da 8:25).
- It appears that this same individual confirms a covenant as a benefactor to Israel, but subsequently violates the covenant instituting a unique time of Jewish persecution (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 12). This is deceptive.
- It is also said that this individual has a deadly wound which is miraculously healed when he arises from the abyss (Rev. 11:7; Rev. 13:3).
- This miraculous restoration leads to world-wide veneration by those who are unprepared to resist deception at the time of the end: “And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his

deadly wound was healed. And all the world *marveled* and followed the beast” (Re 13:3 cf. Rev. 13:12).

- The word for marveled here (*θαυμάζω* [*thaumazō*]), records the response of those who have seen a miracle. In the gospels, it is used to describe the response of those who witnessed *true miracles* at the hand of Jesus:
 - When Jesus miraculously healed a paralytic (Mat. 9:8).
 - When Jesus miraculously cast out a demon from a mute man and he subsequently spoke (Mat. 9:33).
 - When Jesus miraculously healed various physical ailments (Mat. 15:31).
 - When Jesus miraculously withered the fig tree (Mat. 21:20)
 - And many other *genuine miracles*.
- Again: the miracle itself appears to be genuine, but *its origin and that to which it attests* is not according to God.

III. Deception amplified by God

- By the time these deceptive miracles are unleashed upon the world, it appears that knowledge, and certainly acceptance, of the Word of God will be in decline.
- As a result, those who are captivated by these miracles appear completely unprepared to withstand their deceptive nature.
- If that weren't bad enough, Scripture reveals that *God Himself* will contribute to the effectiveness of these deluding acts upon those who reject Him.

a. 2Th. 2:9-12

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and *lying wonders*, and with all *unrighteous deception* among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason *God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie*, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.²

- Here we see the rationale behind the seemingly incredible warning of Jesus concerning the power of this deception.
- Jesus warns that signs and wonders performed by these false imposters are intended “to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mat. 24:24).
- He even underscores the seriousness of the situation: “See, I

have told you beforehand ” (Mat. 24:25).

- This is serious business! Those who are not guarded by God’s Holy Spirit during these events are going to be taken in by the deception!
- This, in part, is why the Scriptures say, “Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2Cor. 6:2).
- We have not yet arrived at the end of the age, but we should expect a growing trend of spiritually-inspired deception culminating in the events described in Scripture.

The sure sign of the Son of Man

Sure, because the Second Coming of Jesus will be a public, sudden, severe, and glorious event.

1. A Public Event

A. Non-local

- “Therefore, if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it” (Mat. 24:26).
- At the Second Coming, Jesus will not be out in some wilderness hide-away where only a choice few or dedicated zealots know to find Him.
- Nor will he be squirreled away in the inner sanctum of a secret fortress or compound accessible only to the initiated.
- One wonders how many false christ’s even to our own time could have been rejected simply on the grounds of this verse?

B. Global

- “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mat. 24:27)
- His coming is compared to lightning which fills the sky. If you are outside (or even inside near any window) you cannot miss it!
- “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they see the Son of Man coming . . .” (Mat. 24:30)
- An unmistakable sign will appear in heaven (here speaking of the atmosphere or sidereal heavens -- space) which will be seen by all peoples.
- “His coming will be visible from coast to coast.”³
- Whatever it looks like, Scripture indicates everyone will know what it

means and Who it is!⁴

2. A Sudden Event

- As lightning "flashes" φαίνω [*phainō*] (appears, shines) from east to west
- How fast does lightning shine from east to west? Well, at the speed of light! :-)
- The implication is that all the world simultaneously becomes aware of Jesus' return.

3. A Severe Event

- The game will be up: the prince of righteousness will have arrived to put down all rebellion (Heb. 6:20; Rev. 19:11).
- This is alluded to by Jesus' in His comment concerning carcasses and eagles (or vultures) in verse 28.
- As I mentioned, I plan to take up this verse in conjunction with verses 38-42.

4. A Glorious Event

A. With Clouds

- All the tribes of the earth mourn when they "see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mat. 24:30).
- John, in the book of Revelation, also indicates Jesus will arrive with clouds (Rev. 1:7).
- Clouds are associated with God throughout the OT and into the NT.⁵
- This proves, no doubt, that Jesus will return to NW Washington, perhaps even to the Olympic Rainforest! :-)

B. Lightning, in addition to clouds

- This appears to describe a *theophany*, a localized appearance of God to men, in this case a divine manifestation of God's glory.
- God's presence is first seen in association with clouds in the Exodus of Israel from Egypt: "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people" (Ex. 13:21-22).
- Notice that this manifestation of God involves both clouds and fire. It would appear that this representation of God involves, at its core fire, shrouded outwardly in clouds so as not to consume the people who saw it.
- Herein is the dilemma: God is an all consuming fire (Ex. 24:17 cf. Deu. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29). His unveiled glory is too intense for men to stand

in its presence.

- This is why Moses was not allowed to see God's face, "[God] said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."" (Ex. [33:20-23](#)).
- So at least one reason for the clouds of heaven is to partially veil divine glory which would otherwise be unapproachable.

C. Clouds at the Second Coming

- The specific connection here is with various passages which also associate Jesus with clouds at His Second Coming.
- Daniel was given a vision, recorded in chapter 7 of his book wherein, "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed" (Da [7:13-14](#)).
- Notice the association between the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven and the arrival of the time of His dominion over all peoples, nations, and languages. This occurs at His Second Coming mentioned here.
- Following these questions by His disciples, Jesus would also refer to His coming with clouds at His trial before Caiaphas, the high priest. When he mentioned the Daniel [7](#) passage during the trial, it resulted in a strong reaction by the high priest who tore his clothes demonstrating that he considered the statement to be blasphemous (Mat. [26:64](#)).
- *As a result of Jesus proclamation to be the Son of Man spoken of in Daniel 7 the Jews believed Him worthy of the death penalty* (Mat. [26:66](#)).
- The Jews understood the nature of His claim. As John explained the concept in his gospel, by claiming ". . . that God was His Father, [Jesus was] making Himself equal with God" (Joh [5:18](#)).

D. What will it look like?

- During His earthly ministry, Jesus gave a demonstration to His closest disciples of what it would look like when He would come in His kingdom. We call this *the Transfiguration*.

- He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Mat. 16:28).
- A few days later, all four gospels record His transfiguration: “. . . He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Mat. 17:2).
- Jesus was revealing to His closest followers His true nature, His glory -- this gives us our best insight into the nature of the “sign of the Son of Man”.
- Jesus won’t just appear on the clouds: His appearance will be in divine glory which will radiate in a way that all will know Who he is!
- Since the sun and moon will be darkened immediately prior to His arrival, the arrival of Jesus in glory will be absolutely stunning!

E. The Glorified Christ

- When Jesus appears in glory at His Second Coming all skepticism concerning His identity and His deity will be turned to mourning and regret.
- The many bold claims Jesus made during His earthly ministry will then be understood, even by those who rejected Him. To highlight just two:
 - On one occasion during His earthly ministry , Jesus offered this unbelievably bold prayer, “ And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (Joh 17:5).
 - Here Jesus asks to be glorified with the Father -- even as He had before the world was! These are clear claims by Jesus to eternity and deity!
 - On another occasion Jesus said, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, *that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father*. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (Joh 5:22-23).
- Are you looking for proof that Jesus is God? If Jesus had *not* been God, He would have no doubt been directly consumed by God, the all-consuming fire, as a result of these statements!

Summary

- As this age draws to a close, a time of unparalleled deception will dawn.
- The deception will be powered by miracles which attest to misleading identities and motives.
- The deception will involve supernatural powers which God allows, even *sends* for the purposes of judging those who will never turn to Him.
- The deception will be so great that it appears only those who have been born

again, the elect, will be able to withstand its allure.

- Jesus reveals a sure sign which identifies the true Christ when He arrives at the end of the age.
- Unlike the arrival of the false messiahs, His arrival will be public, sudden, severe, and glorious.
- It will reveal His true identity to everyone living at that time: both unbelievers and believers.
- How much better to accept His claims now and trust in Him today before all opportunity to be saved is past and He arrives in judgment!

Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Mat. 24:23-30](#)
2. [NKJV, 2Th 2:9-12](#)
3. [Ref-1264](#), p. 473
4. This appears to contrast with Hebrews [9:28](#) which may speak of the Rapture.
5. A small sample of passages which associated God's presence with clouds include Ex. [16:10](#); [19:9](#); [19:16](#); [24:15-16](#); [34:5](#); [40:34](#); Le [16:2](#); De [5:22](#); [33:26](#); 1Ki [8:10-12](#); 2Ch [6:1](#); Job [22:14](#); Ps [18:11](#); [68:34](#); [97:2](#); [99:7](#); [104:3](#); Isa [19:1](#); Da [7:13](#); Mat. [17:5](#); [24:30](#); [26:64](#); Mr [9:2](#); [13:26](#); [14:62](#); Lu [9:34](#); Ac [1:9](#); 1Th [4:17](#); Re [1:7](#).

Sources:

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Ref-1264 Ed Glasscock, *Matthew: A Gospel Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997). ISBN:1-59752-044-6^b.

Links Mentioned Above

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

b - See <http://www.bestbookdeal.com/book/compare/1-59752-044-6>.