

As the Days of Noah (Mat. 24:37-44)

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Working our way through Matthew 24

- The overall context: 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.
- Describing conditions associated with His Second Coming in judgment at the end of this age.

Today's passage (Mathew 24:37-44)

But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.¹

[Ask the congregation who wants to be among those taken?]

As the Days of Noah

What was it like living in the days of Noah?

1. Men were evil

A. An flood of evil and perversity

- “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5)
- How evil was the generation of that day? Out of as many as a few hundred thousand or even billions of people² only Noah and his family -- 8 persons -- were spared!
- What steadfastness was required on the part of Noah and his family to persevere, possibly for as long as 120 years?!⁵

B. Hard-hearted, beyond repentance

- “The Lord is . . . longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter [3:9](#))
- The evil of man was not only great, *it was beyond repentance*. It would seem that God, in His omniscience, was certain the people who perished in the flood would never have turned to Him.
- In a similar way, at the end of this age, God will bring judgment upon another hardened generation which revels in ungodliness and hates Him with such intensity as to be beyond repentance.
- “He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.” (Revelation [22:11](#))

2. Men were no doubt mocking

A. How crazy did Noah appear to be to that generation?

- The concept of a global flood?!
- Building a huge boat, probably the largest ever built up to that time, possibly miles from the sea.
- No way to transport it for launching.

B. Criticism and persecution of the godly in their midst

- Judged by Noah’s righteousness in their midst, “. . . Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.” (Genesis [6:9](#))
- Similar to the experience of Lot in Sodom, “Then [the men of Sodom] said, “This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them.” So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door.” (Genesis [19:9](#))

C. NT reveals that mocking will characterize the last days too

I. 2 Peter [3:3-7](#)

- “. . . scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” For this they *willfully forget*: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, *by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water*. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” (2 Peter [3:3-7](#))
- What does willful forgetfulness look like?
- Seeing millions of marine fossils at high elevations all over the world and concluding: “there is no evidence of a global flood.”

A Sudden Catastrophe

1. Verses 38-41

“For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.” (Matthew [24:38-41](#))

The primary comparison to Noah’s day: normalcy will *suddenly* be taken away.

2. Uniformitarianism is normal

- History, for the most part, has been characterized by long periods where things continue as they were.
- The basis of uniformitarianism: the way things were yesterday they will probably be tomorrow.
- As a result, apart from God’s Word, people are lulled into believing that *if there is a God*, He is most likely an “absentee landlord” who wound things up and is now a somewhat disinterested observer from a distance.

3. Uniformitarianism can be misleading

- This is exactly what Peter tells us that the scoffers are thinking when they say, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, *all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.*” (2 Peter. [3:4](#))
- This is the very reason why Peter mentions the global flood in the same passage: if God intervened to bring global judgment once He can (and will) do so again!
- God is always working in the minute details of day-to-day life *even where we can’t see or know.*
- There are unique times in history where God manifests His control in ways that are undeniable.
- These miraculous interventions of God, once they move from the undeniable presence into the questionable past, are all eventually denied as fable or superstition by those who reject God:
 - the creation *ex-nihilo*
 - the creation of mankind, all descended from a single couple
 - the introduction of languages at Babel
 - the global flood
 - the parting of the Red Sea
 - the resurrection
- These interventions are at odds with the belief that things always continue as they are.
- Just as in Noah’s day, failure to appreciate the rare but real cataclysmic intervention of God will take many by surprise.

4. Where are they taken?

- “the flood came and *took them all away*”

- “two people [in the same situation] . . . one will be *taken*”
- In a similar teaching Jesus gave in Luke [17:37](#), His listeners ask: ““Where, Lord?” So He said to them, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.” ” (Luke [17:37](#))
- This is similar to the statement Jesus made earlier in this passage in verse 28: “Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”
- Jesus appears to be making a direct reference to a passage in the book of Job “Does the eagle mount up at your command, And make its nest on high? On the rocks it dwells and resides, On the crag of the rock and the stronghold. From there it spies out the prey; Its eyes observe from afar. Its young ones suck up blood; And *where the slain are, there it is.*” (Job [39:27-30](#))
- Jesus is underscoring a theme found throughout scripture in which God offers up men as a sacrifice to birds of prey
- And so we read in the 19th chapter of the book of Revelation, in preparation for the arrival of Jesus at the Second Coming, “an angel . . . cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, “Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.”” (Revelation [19:17-18](#))
- The ones taken are *taken in judgment*.

Is This the Rapture?

Although you may have heard this passage associated with the rapture of the Church -- and so would like to find yourself among those “taken”, there are numerous indicators that this passage does not concern of the rescue of the Church at the Rapture.

1. Not the Rapture

1. The context of the passage concerns the Second Coming of Jesus: a time of judgment rather than rescue.
2. The ones taken are *not watching for the thief*.
3. They are “taken” in the same way a thief “steals”: the resulting consequences are negative.
4. The parallelism between those taken at the flood and those taken here: they are the ones judged.
5. Jesus' clarifies their destiny by alluding to a passage in Job indicating they are eaten by birds of prey.
6. One of the purposes of the tribulation during the end of the age is to remove the unrepentant from the earth in preparation for the millennium to follow. The ungodly are *removed* and will not find entry to the kingdom.

2. Removal of the ungodly at the end of this age

- Parable of wheat and tares: both grow together, but at the harvest the tares are burnt (removed) while the wheat goes into the barn (Matthew [13:40-42](#)).
- Dragnet catches both good and bad fish, bad fish are thrown away (removed) (Matthew

13:47).

- Sheep and goat judgment: goats removed leaving the sheep to inherit the kingdom (Mat. 25:46).

3. Differences from the Rapture

Key differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming:

Rapture	Second Coming
<i>godly</i> taken	<i>ungodly</i> taken
taken for <i>preservation</i>	taken for <i>judgment</i>
taken to <i>heaven</i>	taken to <i>hell</i>
those left on earth experience <i>tribulation</i>	those left on earth experience <i>blessing</i>

As A Thief

1. Verses 43-44

“But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Matthew 24:43-44)

A. This is the first of several parables where Jesus teaches the need to be watchful.

- Here, Jesus compares the coming of the Son of Man to the arrival of a thief.
 - Those who are not watching for His coming will be visited in a thief-like way.
 - The clear implication is also that those who do watch will *not* be visited as a thief.
- In the passage that immediately follows this, Jesus contrasts a faithful and an evil servant.
 - The evil servant no longer watches for the arrival of his master and so the master comes “on a day when [the servant] is *not looking* and at an hour when [the servant] is *not aware*” (Mat. 24:50).
 - The servant who did not watch is then cut in two, assigned a place with hypocrites, and experiences “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 24:51).
 - The penalty and destiny for failing to watch is not correction, but severe judgment.
 - This does not describe the destiny of true believers who are secure in Christ.
- Even later in the passage, in the parable of the ten virgins, five of the virgins who are ill-prepared miss the arrival of the bridegroom.
 - As a result, they are *permanently* shut out from the wedding feast⁹.
 - The bridegroom responds to their subsequent attempt to gain entrance to the feast by saying, “I do not know you.”

- If the bridegroom represents Jesus, which seems plain, then this can hardly be the Words of Jesus to true believers.

B. The analogy of being visited by a thief describes the coming of the Lord upon unprepared individuals and a sleeping society, not upon believers.

2. Associated with the arrival of the Day of the Lord

A. 2 Peter 3:9-10

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But *the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night*, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” (2 Peter 3:9-10)

The arrival of the Day of the Lord is likened to being broken into by a thief.

B. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the *day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night*. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this *Day should overtake you as a thief*. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10)

Again, the Day of the Lord “so comes as a thief in the night”. This is not a good thing!

C. Characteristics

Description	Implication
thief in the night	unexpected, while people <i>sleep</i> , negative consequences
peace and safety	business as usual right up until judgment begins (not describing conditions at the end of the tribulation when Jesus returns)
sudden destruction	no time to prepare, negative consequences
sons of light, day, not of the night	believers will not be surprised, the thief coming of Jesus in judgment does not apply to believers (this is not the rapture)
not appointed to wrath	believers escape the wrath of the arriving thief

3. What is the "Day" of the Lord?

The Day of the Lord refers to God's special interventions into the course of world events to judge His enemies, accomplish His purpose for history, and thereby demonstrate who He is--the sovereign God of the universe.¹⁰

A. How can the return of Jesus be unexpected, like a thief, if it follows the cataclysms Jesus described in verses 29-30?

- How could His physical return be unexpected if heavenly and earthly cataclysms lead up to His return?
- How can there be "peace and safety" if the earth is in turmoil in the midst of the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments described in the book of Revelation?

B. The phrase "Day of the Lord" has both a broad and a narrow aspect.

- "The biblical expression "the Day of the Lord" has a double sense (broad and narrow) in relationship to the future. The broad sense refers to an extended period of time involving divine interventions related at least to the 70th week of Daniel and the thousand-year Millennium. . . . in the narrow sense it refers to one specific day--the day on which Christ will return to the earth from heaven with His angels."¹¹
- The Day of the Lord arrives unexpectedly bringing sudden judgment upon an unsuspecting world. This is the *broad* sense of the phrase.
- The specific day on which Jesus returns is at the end of the cataclysmic signs. This is the *narrow* sense of the phrase.

C. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 - the broad sense

- "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of *the Lord [of Christ]* has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-5)
- This cannot refer to the day of His actual physical arrival at the very end of the age or there would be no question about whether the "day of Christ had come." The reason they were concerned whether "that day" had already come is because they understood it to introduce a period of judgment which is not attended by His physical presence--which only follows later.

Summary

- What are the main points we should learn from this passage?
 1. Those who take God's warnings to heart will be expectantly awaiting His arrival -- whether at the Rapture of the Church (not in view here) or at the dawning of the Day of the Lord and His subsequent Second Coming in judgment.

2. In Noah's time, there came a day when God shut the door to the Ark and the first drops of rain began to fall (Gen. 7:16). Thereafter, there was no recourse for those who were "taken."
3. "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"" (Hebrews 3:7-11)
4. Now is the time to enter the safety of the Ark -- before the door shuts.
 - Trust in Jesus and He will deliver you from the wrath to come (1Th. 1:10).

Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Mat. 24:37-44
2. "Estimates [of the pre-flood population] have ranged from a few hundred thousand to 17 billion people." <http://www.answeringgenesis.org/PublicStore/pdfs/SampleChapter/10-2-267.pdf> [accessed 20120204].
3. Ref-0187, Gen. 6:3
4. Ref-0150, 310
5. "It is probable that the corruption of the world, which had now reached its height, had been long and gradually increasing, and this idea receives support from the long respite granted."³ "The holy one blessed be He patiently warned evil mankind for one hundred and twenty years before he unleashed the flood."⁴
6. http://atheism.wikia.com/wiki/Noah%27s_flood [accessed 20120204].
7. <http://www.asktheatheists.com/questions/1388-how-to-disprove-a-global-flood-2200-bc/> [accessed 20120204].
8. <http://www.skeptdic.com/noahsark.html> [accessed 20120204].
9. NASB
10. Ref-0588, 38
11. Ref-0588, 35-39

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-0150** Chaim Potok, *Wanderings* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1978).
- Ref-0187** Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-0588** Showers, R. E. (1995). *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!* (electronic ed.). Bellmawr, New Jersey: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.

Links Mentioned Above

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