

Signs of His Coming
Matthew 24:32—51

According to Matthew 24:29—31 the Tribulation is followed by two major events, the Second coming and the gathering of the elect. Daniel 12 ends with two dates beyond the end of the Tribulation, 30 days and 75 days after the end of the Tribulation. If these two passages are related then the Second Coming will happen 30 days after the end of the Tribulation and the gathering of believers will happen 45 days after that.

The sign of His coming (verses 32—35)

Time and time again Israel is told to watch the signs and to be ready for these events to happen. At the beginning of Matthew 24 the Disciples ask Jesus when will all the stones of the temple be torn down and what will be the sign of His coming. The rest of chapter 24 is in answer to these questions. Verses 32—33 relate watching for these signs to a fig tree. Summer is near when the fig tree sprouts leaves. Without looking at a calendar a person can see that summer is soon to come by observing leaves on a fig tree just as we know summer is coming when leaves begin budding on trees in spring.

Jesus told the Disciples to watch out for the rise of false Christs with deceiving powers, apostates will come into the assemblies, there will be an increase in wars around Jerusalem, believers will be ostracized and killed by fellow Jews for not accepting the antichrist as Israel's Messiah and there will be many cosmological signs including the sun being darkened and the moon turning to blood. The believing remnant are to watch for these things and know that God is soon to come in power and glory and save them from their distress. This is why they are told to watch (Matthew 24:42—43; 25:13; Mark 13:33—37). Christ gave them these signs so that they would look for them to come to pass and be comforted that His coming would be soon and that all these things were in God's control. The signs given to identify His coming will not tell them precisely the minute Christ is coming but they will be able to know it is close (Matthew 24:36).

In contrast to this, Paul never tells us to watch for signs of His coming. He tells us to watch how we walk and to be alert and to redeem the time (use our time wisely). This is because there are no signs for us to watch for, only trends in this Age of Grace. Those saved under the Kingdom program have very specific things that will happen before Christ returns and these are the things that they will watch for. Israel was told to watch because there will be something to watch for while we are never told to watch for signs being fulfilled because there are no signs to watch for. This is another indication that the Rapture is separate and distinct from the Second Coming.

It's sad to see Christians looking for signs of Christ's return. What a waste of time and energy! Paul's concern was for us to live godly lives, not trying to figure out when He is coming back. If people would understand that the program for Israel is completely separate from the program for the Church than much of this confusion would dissolve and Christians could concentrate on growing up into Him who is our head (Ephesians 4:15) walking worthy of the Lord bearing fruit and increasing in our knowledge of Him (Colossians 1:10).

Coming as a thief (verses 42—44)

The second coming is compared to a thief breaking into a house to steal valuables. In context Christ is the thief coming unexpectedly and surprising those in the house. The house of Israel is to be watching and waiting for His return so that when Christ comes, they will not be surprised. Only believers will be watching for the signs so when He comes they will not be shocked but will rejoice.

2 Peter 3:9—10 expands on the time of Christ's coming by encouraging the Kingdom believers, who have seen the promise of the Kingdom seemingly disappear, that God will fulfill His promises. The Lord is still scheduled to come as a thief in the night, catching those who are not looking for Him off guard. This day

has been delayed but not canceled. The reason for the delay is that Israel rejected the offer of the Kingdom. Once the Church, the Body of Christ is raptured, according to Paul's Mystery, then God will once again begin dealing with Israel according to Prophecy, including the Tribulation and Second Coming.

There is a warning to the church at Sardis that if they are not watching that Christ will come as a thief. This church is a Hebrew church formed during the Tribulation, not an existing (or previous) church. The seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, I believe, are churches toward the end of the Tribulation who are encouraged to hang on just a little bit longer and to remain faithful to the end. According to Revelation 3:4 only a few people (a remnant) in the church at Sardis will have remained faithful.

Another reference to Christ coming as a thief is found in Revelation 16:15. This is toward the end of the Tribulation when Satan is gathering the world's armies to make war with Israel and God. As the Little Flock of believers sees this happening they should be able to follow these events in their Bibles and know that this is a sign that the end of the Tribulation is quickly approaching.

Faithful servant (Verses 45—51; Mark 13:33—37; Luke 12:39—48)

Luke expands on what Matthew writes about the faithful servant. Remember, Jesus is privately answering the Disciple's questions about the end times. According to Luke, after Jesus told the Disciples that if the servant who was in charge of the house knew a thief was coming that he would not allow him to break in. Peter then asks Jesus if this parable is directed to the Disciples or to Israel. Jesus does not give a direct answer but asks Peter just who is the faithful servant who is to give out rations to the slaves at the proper time?

I believe the answer to this question is found in early Acts when the assembly of believers all sold their belongings and put the proceeds onto a common pot. Acts 4:34—35 explains that they all felt compelled to sell all they had and they gave it all to the Disciples for them to distribute as needed. The Disciples will be put in charge of the Little Flock's spiritual and physical needs. They will be instrumental in making sure they arrive safely on the other side of the Tribulation. If they faithfully execute their duties then they will be rewarded for their work and faith.

Notice that Luke 12:42 is specifically addressed to Peter as being the faithful and sensible steward who will be in charge of the servants. Peter is seen as the doorkeeper in Mark 13:34 who is the head of the house commanded to be on the alert for the coming of the Messiah. As we saw earlier in Matthew 16:19 Peter was given the keys to the Kingdom in effect making him the highest official ruling in the Kingdom just under Christ and King David. The other Disciples will also be ruling from Jerusalem and will report to Peter who will be ruler over all the Master's goods (Matthew 19:28; 24:47).

Unfaithful servant (verses 48—51)

There will be many in Israel who believe that Jesus was the Messiah but will begin to doubt their belief while going through the Tribulation. Those who do not accept the mark of the beast will not be able to buy or sell and life will become extremely difficult for them after the middle of the Tribulation. Before this, family and friends will turn away from them for rejecting the antichrist as their Messiah. All these things will become too much to bear and they will give up waiting for Christ to come and conform themselves to the world. James addresses these people as those who do not submit themselves to God (James 4:1—7). They are exhorted to be patient for the coming of the Lord (James 5:7—11).

The Messiah will suddenly confront those who do fall away and they will be cast into everlasting destruction. These people did not lose their salvation but were never truly believers. They were like the masses of disciples who turned away from Jesus when the going got tough (John 6:66) and like Judas who appeared as a believer but was not. This is why 1 John was written, so that the Little Flock of believers going through the Tribulation will have the assurance of their salvation and be able to discern true believers.

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