

INVITATION – BE “CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT”

(A MATTHEW 24–25 SERIES)

PART 9

(verses 36-41)

Introduction

A major transition now occurs in Christ’s amazing end-time discourse. Up to now Jesus has spoken predictively (including His referencing a segment of Daniel!) – but now He moves to teaching parenthetically.¹

- He is not adding new prophetic information until 25:31.
- His new illustrations and counsel orient the student in how to respond to the information He has completed.

His purpose in giving the following messages is clearly to avoid misuse of that prophetic material. Yet, even today, many misuse Christ’s important explanatory illustrations!

Up to this point, Jesus has been emphasizing the nearness of His coming in the context of specific signs! That understanding is a unique key to all apocalyptic prophecy. Daniel was told that certain segments of his prophecies were for the “time of the end” (8:17; 11:35; 12:4, 9). **When** the events ***begin*** to unfold, the prophetic messages would be unsealed – understood then as present truth – and be fulfilled. John was told that Revelation’s narrative would “shortly come to pass” and that “the time is at hand” (1:1, 3). However, it must be read within the ***context*** of that prophecy ***entering*** future history. It wasn’t for his day. Gabriel quickly oriented his thinking by stating ***when*** that urgent period was: “Behold he cometh with clouds” (1:7). Thus, we are sensitized that John’s whole book is in an eschatological context (Revelation 1:1, 3 and 7 are linked together).

Another eschatological end-time “anchor point” that Christ gave relates to specific ***time***. Christ had recently referenced Daniel and his narrations on the “abomination” and “desolation” issues (Matthew 24:15), which are associated with ***prophetic time periods!*** A 1335-day, a 1290-day and a three-and-a-half-year period are described, which terminate at the “deliverance” of God’s people (Daniel 12:1). Daniel was told that this was an “appointed time” directly related to the “time of the end” (clearly just preceding the eschaton).

- Expositor White knew this:
“To the period just prior to the appearing of the Son of man, the prophecies of Scripture point, and here their warnings and threatenings pre-eminently apply. The ***prophetic periods*** of Daniel, extending to the very eve of the great consummation, throw a flood of light upon events then to transpire. The book of Revelation is also replete with warning and instruction for the last generation”² (written in 1883).

¹ Turner, David L.; *Matthew* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 587.

² White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, September 25, 1883.

- We've recently heard another distinct Mathian period: "one generation," when all the major events would be completed in 40 years.
- Christ also revealed that as close as predicting the anticipated harvest season of a fig tree, one can interpret the end-time signs pointing to His return.

What now follows matures the timing prophecies Jesus wishes to present in this Olivet discourse. It should be noted that when all of these "clocks" are put together, a dramatic story of accelerated urgency is apparent – a "present truth" narrative that one must not risk missing.

Jesus now continues his Mathian discourse.

His Orientation Thoughts on "Time"

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

This verse has given many scholars anxiety. Jesus has spoken of the nearness of His return – now its timing can't seemingly be determined. This appears at first blush to be a declaration of eschatological ignorance. More problematic – even Christ appears to be pleading naivety!

There are two unfortunate reflex reactions to this verse – each tries to justify ignorance regarding its real eschatological meaning.

1. We must not focus on time since Jesus said that He didn't even know "when."
2. The ignorance of Jesus must mean a distinction between the "Son of man" and the "Son of God." The incarnation "limited his divine attributes" (cf. Philippians 2:6-8). Some even say that this implies that God withheld information from Jesus – and certainly us.

The issue: "What must be differentiated ... are the signs of the approach of the eschaton and the eschaton itself."³

- That explanation is profound!
- We are to discern those obvious signs that do point to the imminence of the end!
- But – its precise **moment** will remain a mystery.

Expositor White penetrated this understanding long ago:

- "The definite time ... [is] beyond the ken of mortals."⁴
- "The exact time ... is not revealed."⁵

Each of those statements alludes to the "day and hour" reference. Thus, one must be cautious in using this verse. "That day and hour" is specific and refers to the **exact time** of the second **return** of Jesus. That won't be known.

³ Hagner, Donald A.; *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson Reference & Electronic, Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers), vol. 33B, p. 716.

⁴ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 307 (1879).

⁵ White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, June 24, 1889.

Since Jesus quickly inserts, “not even the angels of heaven ... but my Father only,” it suggests that the “Son of man” didn’t know also (some translations even insert this explanation).

- Jesus is not appealing to His divine nature.
- He is emphasizing that the precise day and hour is withheld from mankind – and even the angels.
- But we have already been told that it would occur within one generation of specific signs.⁶
- The “approach” of the eschaton is to be our emphasis!

We can know when it is even “at the doors” (Matthew 24:33). Ignorance of the timing of the end has no excuse. There is simply too much informative prophecy to neglect that orientation. The subsequent illustrations elevate this further!

Day of the Lord as the Days of Noah

Christ persistently inserts “contingency messages,” restating his end-time positions. He implies that “these are principles and facts that must not be misunderstood.” Here is another:

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-30).

For the majority of the earth’s inhabitants, life appears untroubled and routine. Yet – they had been warned of a pending cataclysmic end – and the opportunity for repentance had been given.

- All summonses to prepare were rejected.
- Noah faithfully forewarned earth’s inhabitants of a coming omen.
- Its reality was denied. God’s messenger was not held in esteem.

The next phrase in verse 39 is critical: *“And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be”* (Matthew 24:39).

They “knew not” suggests that they were not emotionally expecting that the end would arrive. They had been untroubled by Noah’s “loud cry.” It physically and cognitively took them by surprise. They had blocked the strongest convicting message that God could bring through His messenger!

“They did not know until,” suggests that those antediluvian despisers of grace would not believe danger until it was experienced. Matthew then, in a matter-of-fact portrayal, simply notes: “The flood ... took them all away.”

Failure to heed anticipatory warnings (prophecy) led to temporal and eternal loss.

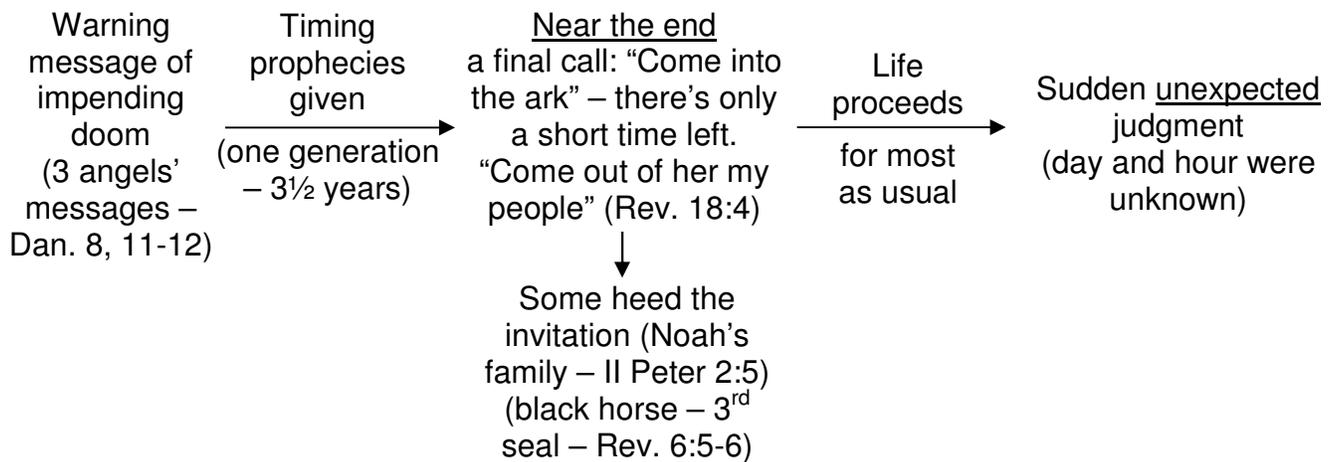
There are several profound messages within this illustration:

⁶ Nolland, John; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 991.

1. Everyone was unaware of the **exact day and hour**. There was no such prophetic information.
2. The time of probation, however, was given as 120 years (Genesis 6:3).
3. The desolating message was specific – a flood on planet earth (Genesis 6:17).
4. A divinely directed preparation of food was completed for man and beast (Genesis 6:21).
5. God provided a stunning “sign” that impending doom was about to occur. The entrance of male and female animals into the ark was a supernatural event.
6. At the end there were two groups: one saved (small number), the other lost (large number).

Both Matthew and Luke conclusively state that “as the days of Noe were, so shall the coming of the Son of man be (Matthew 24:37, Luke 17:26).

Summation points:



Paul's Informative Appeal

Christians often distort the concept that Jesus will come **as** a thief in the night.

- *“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape”* (I Thessalonians 5:1-3).
- *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night”* (II Peter 3:10a).

This “belief” suggests again that one is justifying ignorance. But – Paul had some additional pointed counsel for God’s people.

“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (I Thessalonians 5:4-8).

The “children of the light” – those aware of end-time prophecy – will not be surprised at the arrival of end-time drama!

The timing parallels between Noah’s day and the Second Coming (*parousia*) are beautiful:

	<u>General</u>	<u>Specific</u>
Noah	120 years	animals enter ark
<i>Parousia</i>	40 years	3½ years – abomination laws

Luke embellishes these concerns by adding the apocalyptic story of Lot and the city of Sodom (Genesis 19:16-17). The inhabitants of that wicked city despised the divine messengers and were unprepared for the cataclysmic end.

- All these revelations show explicit timing and dramatic events that leave unexcused a lack of understanding.
- Even Noah’s entrance into the ark failed to alter the behavior of the populace.
- That final rejection freed God to bring the intended judgments.⁷
- *“And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly”* (II Peter 2:5).
- *“Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished”* (II Peter 3:6).

Despite Noah’s preaching and Lot’s appeal, their denial created a spirit of oblivious disinterest to any threat.

Illustrating Parables

There are three parables that Jesus uses to highlight His eschatological missives, adding a timing focus.⁸

- Matthew 24:40-41 – The return of Christ is completely **unexpected**.
- Matthew 24:45-51 – The return is **sooner than expected**.
- Matthew 25:1-13 – The return occurs **later than expected**.

These address three distinct unprepared groups. We address the first here.

The First Parable Illustration

“Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left” (Matthew 24:40-41).

- This story is a follow-up to verse 39, where Jesus said that they “knew not until the flood came, and took them all away.”
- They are going about their normal lives when Jesus comes with His angels to gather the elect (24:31).
- Those left behind cry for the rocks and mountains to fall on them to hide them from the face of Him on the throne (Revelation 6:16-17).

⁷ Nolland, *op. cit.*, p. 993.

⁸ Hagner, *op. cit.*, p. 718.

This “unexpected separation” is an anticipatory alarm, a divine warning of what to expect at the Second Coming (I Corinthians 16:13; I Thessalonians 5:6; I Peter 5:8; Revelation 3:2-3, 16:15; cf. Matthew 25:31-46).⁹

- “*Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come*” (Matthew 24:42).

In these illustrations (collectively Matthew 24 and Luke 17):

1. Two men in field: One saved
2. Two at grinding mill: One saved
3. Two in bed: One saved

The one left behind – a wicked person – will die. He is eternally lost.

- Many conclude that this is the “secret rapture,” a pre-tribulation coming. But Jesus nowhere alludes to such an event.
- Matthew 24:29-30 reveals a clean sequence of events, showing the *parousia* to be His coming **after** the tribulation.
- The Bible messages are distinct between the saved and the lost (Matthew 24:38-39, 13:41-42). In 24:31 there is a “gathering of the elect.” The wheat is gathered into the barn” (Matthew 3:12). The chaff is destroyed.

Perhaps most importantly is the referencing of Luke’s rendition of this. He concludes with a very interesting verse:

- “*And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together*” (Luke 17:37).
 - This recalls the vultures circling overhead in Matthew 24:28.
 - This metaphor suggests that as a vulture won’t miss a dead body –
 - Once separation occurs (cf. Matthew 25:32-33), there is no turning back.
 - The wicked will be left and will succumb to the brightness of His coming.
- This verse reflects the finality of that time.

The return of Jesus is longed for. But when He comes, the ultimate executive separation occurs. It is eternal loss for those not expecting Him!¹⁰

The next two parables will be reviewed in the next lesson.

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⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 720.

¹⁰ Bock, Darrell L.; *Luke*, vol. 2 (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI – 1996), p. 1440.