

DRAMA AT THE SECOND COMING

(A MATTHEW 24–25 SERIES)

PART 6

Introduction

From Matthew 24:23 through chapter 25 Christ presents assorted sketches of Second Advent issues. He does this with the clear prediction and concern that His return will be counterfeited and/or incorrectly portrayed!

- His whole discourse **began** with a warning: *“Take heed that no man deceive you”* (24:4).
- The prophecy moved through an event-filled sequence, including earth’s greatest tribulation (24:21-22).
- In the middle of that apocalyptic narrative He warned again of false teachers who would “deceive many” about those end-time events (24:11).

As Christ’s prophetic discourse nears its end, He pauses once again, with special commentary, to further describe this anticipated pre-advent “trickery.”

- The possibility of being misled is **so high** that He warns against **counterfeit claims**, even a staging of the Second Advent!

“Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Therefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not” (Matthew 24:23-26).

- He enjoins everyone: “Supernatural displays and miraculous claims will be a reality.”
- At every stage of this Olivet discourse Christ cautions that one could be led astray:
 - By false Christs (24:4-5, 23-26)
 - By false prophets (24:11, 23-26)
 - By miracles (24:23-26)
- This amazing narrative reveals that these false representatives **will** appeal to the **senses** in an overpowering way.

“Modern spiritualism, resting upon the same foundation, is but a revival in a new form of the witchcraft and demon worship that God condemned and prohibited of old. It is foretold in the Scriptures, which declare that ‘in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to **seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.**’ 1 Timothy 4:1. Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, points to the special working of Satan in **spiritualism as an event to take place immediately before the second advent of Christ.** Speaking of Christ’s second coming, he declares that it is ‘after the working of Satan **with all power and signs and lying wonders.**’ 2 Thessalonians 2:9. And Peter, describing the dangers to which the church was to be exposed in the **last days**, says that as there were false prophets who led Israel into sin, so there will be false teachers, ‘who

privily shall **bring in damnable heresies**, even denying the Lord that bought them.... And many shall follow their pernicious ways.' 2 Peter 2:1, 2. Here the apostle has pointed out one of the marked characteristics of spiritualist teachers."¹

Twice Jesus uses the wording "*If any man shall say*" – then He concludes "*believe it not.*" What do they claim?

- Christ is said to be here or there (generic), in the desert (open to view) or in a secret chamber (private location).
- "*Don't believe it.*"

All these have **one thing in common!** Christ appearing **ON planet earth** in **some location**.

Christ now becomes directive, emphatic and prophetic (24:24):

- There **will** arise false Christs and false prophets.
- They **will** exhibit great signs and wonders.
 - So impressive will these be that
 - There is a risk that the most intelligent and committed-to-God person might be deceived.

In combining verses 25 and 26c, we note:

- "*As I've shared with you before: 'believe it not.'*"
- "Contrary to all sensory evidence, rely in faith on the vast prophetic knowledge base I've given you regarding the end."
- And again, this emphatic warning: "**Go not forth**" (24:26).

Why does Jesus advise us not to even come in contact with those agencies? Why not hear them out? This was best addressed by expositor White:

"Some tamper with Spiritualism to gratify their curiosity. They have no real faith in it, and would start back with horror at the thought of being mediums; yet they place themselves in a position where Satan can exercise his power upon them. They do not mean to enter deep into this work; but they know not what they are doing. They are venturing upon forbidden ground; and the mighty destroyer considers them his lawful prey, and exercises his power upon them against their will. They have yielded their mind to his control, and he holds them captives. Nothing can deliver these ensnared souls but the power of God in answer to the earnest prayers of his faithful followers."²

A false Messiah is in view. The dynamics of Christ's warnings must become compelling truth! Fully trust in the possibility you might be deceived – because:

1. **At a time** of stress and trouble – and likely loss
2. A "Messiah" will appear

¹ White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 686.

² White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, November 13, 1884.

3. Attracting the hearts of individuals longing for relief and tangible hope.
4. Beware!!!

“As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour’s advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. Revelation 1:13-15. The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: ‘Christ has come! Christ has come!’ The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts up his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth. His voice is soft and subdued, yet full of melody. In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed. He declares that those who persist in keeping holy the seventh day are blaspheming his name by refusing to listen to his angels sent to them with light and truth. This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion. Like the Samaritans who were deceived by Simon Magus, the multitudes, from the least to the greatest, give heed to these sorceries, saying: This is ‘the great power of God.’ Acts 8:10.”³

The Real Messiah

This warning drama has now set the stage for Christ to reveal **how** the true Messiah is **to appear – to come** to earth again!

- He will not be confined to an earthly geographic location
- Not with signs and wonders, wooing the curious mind
- But in **celestial glory**

“For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:27).

- Note: Jesus will pick up the prophetic narrative from verse 22 in verse 29!
- Here in this verse the Second Coming message is a distinct commentary insert to be compared to the false-Christ warnings!

Jesus portrays that His return to planet earth will be unmistakably different from any other “messianic” event.

- It will be as lightning flashing across the sky from east to the west (cf. Exodus 19:16, Isaiah 62:1, Ezekiel 43:2, Zechariah 9:14).
- ***“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen”*** (Revelation 1:7).

³ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 624.

Luke's rendition notes also that Jesus' return will be with **power and great glory** (Luke 17:24, 21:27). He comes as a unique, **regal figure**⁴ (cf. Zechariah 9:14).⁵ It will be a global event.

The word **parousia** for coming is even used by Paul (I Corinthians 15:23; I Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13) as a **specific word** usually related to Christ's **Second Coming** (cf. James 5:7–8:2, II Peter 3:4, I John 2:28).

It is crucial to observe that "signs and wonders" by themselves are inadequate to demonstrate a prophet's authenticity (Matthew 7:21, II Thessalonians 2:9, Deuteronomy 13:1-5).⁶

- But here the Messianic drama is distinctive for the *parousia* accounts.
- Christ's return will be dramatic and sky-oriented – we will **"look up!"**
- All of the false-Christ prophecies are **earth-related**.
- This suggests that Satan and his minions will be limited in their exhibition possibilities.

A Stunning Pause

"For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matthew 24:28; cf. Luke 17:37).

- Christ has come
- Then this strange, yes, morose, commentary

The word for eagles is *aetos*. Contextually, it alludes to vultures eating carrion, but is used here to symbolize an end-time event.

- Later, we are told that just before the *parousia*, God's witnesses will be killed (silenced), bringing "joy" and "celebration" to earth's wicked inhabitants (Revelation 11:9-10).
- Here in this Mathian message, God has the "last word." The wicked will be destroyed at the Second Advent of Christ.

Though the wicked seem to have an advantage at first over the saints, at the end Christ and His followers triumph.

- The imagery puts the wicked on notice: They will lie in the open and be food for the vultures!

Even more pointed is a reminder from Paul that the brightness of Jesus' coming spells out death to the wicked.

- ***"And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming"* (II Thessalonians 2:8).**

⁴ Bock, Darrell L.; *Luke* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), vol. 2, p. 1686.

⁵ Hagner, Donald A.; *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson Reference & Electronic, Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers) 33B, pp. 706-707.

⁶ Keener, Craig S.; *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 582.

- cf. **“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”** (Revelation 6:15-16).

From **persecution** (24:9) to a time of **great tribulation** (24:21), it appears that Satan triumphs. Jesus is saying, “Just wait.” The final eschatological battle reveals the universal death of the wicked. The thoroughness is depicted by those vultures eating the dead bodies – symbolically depicting that nothing will be left (Luke 17:37).

- Just as Christ’s Second Coming will be visible to everyone (Revelation 1:7)
- So will be the destruction of the wicked. It will be universally seen and affirmed.⁷

This moment in time reveals when the final separation of the wheat and the tares occurs. It is ordained to occur at the *parousia*.

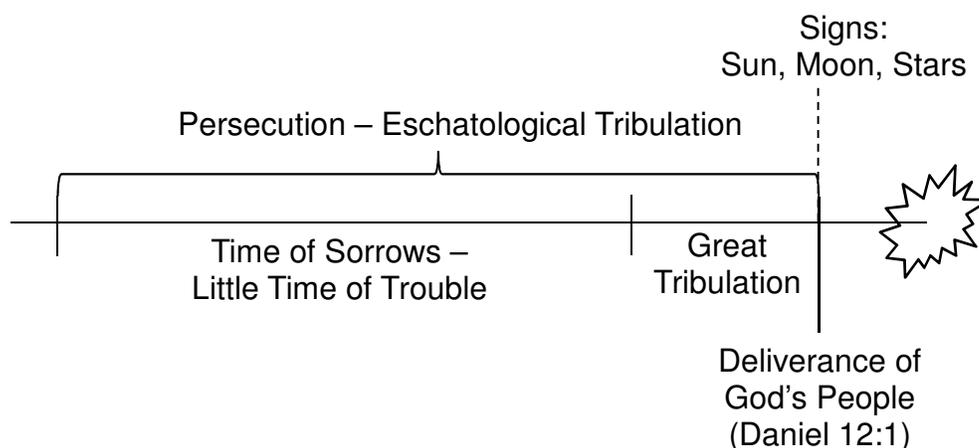
“Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn” (Matthew 13:30).

In Matthew 24:29 the final prophetic events surrounding that *parousia* are presented.

That Transition Now Begins

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29-30).

Contextually, the great tribulation (vs 21) has just come to an end. These verses provide clarifying information related to the *parousia*! Matthew is the only writer to use the words “immediately after.”



⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 583.

The use of the word “immediately” suggests that there is no delay between the end of the great tribulation (portrayed through the seven-vial plagues – Revelation 16) and the onset of celestial signs. They occur sequentially, rapidly and just preceding Jesus’ return.

“It is very difficult to believe that the words ‘immediately after’ refers only to something general in the indeterminate future.”⁸ It is a specific time marker!

There is an antecedent, and it is found in Daniel 8, 9, 11 and 12. A general tribulation is there seen within a timing context. It ends with the deliverance of God’s people! That is also a grand finale of the great tribulation of Daniel 12:1. Thus, it is a general time of stress and great time of heartache at that night of deliverance and immediately afterwards.

- The sun becomes dark and the moon does not giving her light.
- Originally prophesied in Isaiah 13:10 (cf. Joel 2:10)
- Matthew associates these events with the *parousia* (cf. Isaiah 34:4) and the falling stars.

A parallel prophecy was revealed to John while on the island of Patmos.

- “*And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places*” (Revelation 6:12-14).
- An earthquake is introduced as occurring **at the same time** as the celestial events.

This short time period (45 days from Daniel 12⁹) sees the power of heaven shaken (Matthew 24:29).

“It is at midnight that **God manifests His power for the deliverance of His people**. The sun appears, shining in its strength. Signs and wonders follow in quick succession. The wicked look with terror and amazement upon the scene, while the righteous behold with solemn joy the tokens of their deliverance. Everything in nature seems turned out of its course. The streams cease to flow. Dark, heavy clouds come up and clash against each other. In the midst of the angry heavens is one clear space of indescribable glory, whence comes the voice of God like the sound of many waters, saying: ‘It is done.’ Revelation 16:17.

“That voice shakes the heavens and the earth. There is a mighty earthquake, ‘such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.’ Verses 17, 18. The firmament appears to open and shut. The glory from the throne of God seems flashing through. The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and ragged rocks are scattered on every side. There is a roar as of a coming tempest. The sea is lashed into fury. There is heard the shriek of a hurricane like the voice of demons upon a mission of destruction. **The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea**. Its surface is breaking up. Its very foundations seem to be giving way. Mountain chains are sinking. Inhabited islands disappear....

⁸ Hagner, *op. cit.*, p. 712.

⁹ Fowler, Franklin S., Jr., M.D.; *Scriptures Most Important Time Prophecies* (Christian Heritage Foundation; Lucerne Valley, CA).

“Thick clouds still cover the sky; yet the sun now and then breaks through, appearing like the avenging eye of Jehovah. Fierce lightnings leap from the heavens, enveloping the earth in a sheet of flame. Above the terrific roar of thunder, voices, mysterious and awful, declare the doom of the wicked. The words spoken are not comprehended by all; but they are distinctly understood by the false teachers. Those who a little before were so reckless, so boastful and defiant, so exultant in their cruelty to God's commandment-keeping people, are now overwhelmed with consternation and shuddering in fear. Their wails are heard above the sound of the elements. Demons acknowledge the deity of Christ and tremble before His power, while men are supplicating for mercy and groveling in abject terror.

“Said the prophets of old, as they beheld in holy vision the day of God: ‘Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.’ Isaiah 13:6. ‘Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon everyone that is proud and lofty, and upon everyone that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.’ ‘In that day a man shall cast the idols of his silver, and the idols of his gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth.’ Isaiah 2:10-12, 20, 21, margin.

“Through a rift in the clouds there beams a star whose brilliancy is increased fourfold in contrast with the darkness. It speaks hope and joy to the faithful, but severity and wrath to the transgressors of God's law. Those who have sacrificed all for Christ are now secure, hidden as in the secret of the Lord's pavilion. They have been tested, and before the world and the despisers of truth they have evinced their fidelity to Him who died for them. A marvelous change has come over those who have held fast their integrity in the very face of death. They have been suddenly delivered from the dark and terrible tyranny of men transformed to demons. Their faces, so lately pale, anxious, and haggard, are now aglow with wonder, faith, and love. Their voices rise in triumphant song: ‘God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.’ Psalm 46:1-3.”¹⁰

Intriguingly, Peter details this event-driven period:

- *“And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come”* (Acts 2:19-20).
- These celestial events announce to mankind that a dramatic end is in view.
- These celestial signs bring one to the very edge of the eschaton.
- These also represent the celebration of the celestial wedding that is occurring between the Lamb of God and His bride! We will be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

The falling of the stars is seen elsewhere, always related to an eschatological scene (Amos 8:9, Ezekiel 32:7-8; cf. Haggai 2:6).¹¹

¹⁰ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 637-638.

¹¹ Keener, *op. cit.*, p. 585.

When He returns shortly thereafter, with dazzling brightness, the celestial celebration will peak!

Another insight filled with stunning thought: When the tribulation ceases, it will be on an Atonement Day. This is when Satan, as the scapegoat, receives all the forgiven sins of the righteous.¹² The wedding can then proceed between Christ and His church. God's people then receive the everlasting covenant that symbolizes that their union with Him is complete!

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God” (Revelation 19:7-9).

He Comes

The dramatic arrival of Jesus is now described (Matthew 24:30). The next few verses will fill in explanatory details surrounding that *parousia* or coming.

1. The universal awareness of supernatural cosmic change announces the end of the tribulation and this expected return of Jesus.
2. Distinct sequences in these apocalyptic events have been established:
 - a. Collective horrors – wars to calamities – on planet earth (Matthew 24:7-8)
 - b. Then – persecution (vs 9)
 - c. Then – universal hatred among man (vs 10)
 - d. For them – great tribulation (vs 21)
 - e. Immediately after – celestial signs (v 29)
 - f. Then – The Son of man comes (vs 30)

***“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matthew 24:30).**

- This verse is a blending of Jeremiah 4:13, Daniel 7:13-14 and Zechariah 12:10, 12.¹³
- The “sign of the Son of man” is His coming on the **clouds** (Daniel 7:13, Jeremiah 4:13).
- “Clouds” are presented as a recurrent motif associated with the *parousia* (Acts 1:9, 11; I Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 1:7, 11; 14:14).
- “Clouds” are prophetically associated with the movement of the Son of man.¹⁴
- The association of a figure “riding on the clouds” is often tied to the authority of God.¹⁵ (Exodus 14:20, 34:5; Numbers 10:34; Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1).
- The imagery pointedly reveals comprehensive visibility at Jesus’ return. There will be no secret appearing – again highlighting the nature of the coming of a false Christ.

¹² White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 640.

¹³ Turner, David L.; *Matthew* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 582.

¹⁴ Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 776.

¹⁵ Bock, *op. cit.*, p. 1685.

Lest there be any question regarding **who** this “Son of man” is, in the next verse we learn that He will send His angels to glean the harvest. This “Man” is divine, having authority to dispatch His angels to gather His elect.¹⁶

- Within this elevating narrative comes a sad thought:
- *“And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (vs 30b).
 - There will be a point in time when all the wicked collectively realize that they are lost.
 - This verse depicts that moment.

Matthew is not alone: *“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”* (Revelation 6:15-16).

- The appearance of “great glory” is eschatological (Sib. Oracles 3.282; cf. Isaiah 40:5, 60:1-2, II Thessalonians 1:9).
- Repentance is no longer possible.
- For those who have spurned God’s last invitation, it will be a time of unparalleled anguish.

The “gathering” together of the saints is now described:

“And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31).

The “four corners” or “four winds” allude to the extreme points of the compass. They come from the whole world and include Jew and Gentile.¹⁷ The theme is universality of this gathering.

The Trumpet Call

The “great sound” of a trumpet is the signal to begin the harvesting. Such a gathering of the righteous was noted by Isaiah: *“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem”* (Isaiah 27:13). The “holy mount” is Mount Zion, a symbol of where Jesus will be with the saved (Revelation 14:1-5).

Similar imagery is noted in Paul and Zechariah’s writings:

¹⁶ Keener, *op. cit.*, p. 586.

¹⁷ Hagner, *op. cit.*, p. 714.

- “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the **trump of God**: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (I Thessalonians 4:16).
- “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the **last trump**: for **the trumpet shall sound**, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (I Corinthians 15:52).
- “And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord GOD shall **blow the trumpet**, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south” (Zechariah 9:14).

The picture of the last trumpet draws from the dramatic series of the seven apocalyptic trumpets.

- John notes that when the seventh trumpet angel begins to sound, the “mystery of God” will be finished (Revelation 10:7).
- Then that seventh angel sounds and the redemption issue comes to an end.
“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

The separation of the wheat and tares, involving all humanity, has just occurred.¹⁸

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¹⁸ Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 583.