

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 83, Chapter 24 Continued 4

For the majority of New Testament commentators, the explanation of Matthew chapter 24 is among the most (if not the most) extensive required of all the Gospels combined. The main reason is because Yeshua speaks so considerably about the future and the End Times (what academics call eschatology). That He speaks from a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish mindset, using vocabulary and illustrations that reflect the common culture of that era, makes it all the more challenging. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that we are in our 4<sup>th</sup> lesson on Matthew 24 and have yet to reach the halfway point of a teaching He gave that is so consequential to our faith in God and to our spiritual well-being.

In a previous lesson I poked a little fun at the modern age fictional writers' visualizations and characterizations of the Rapture as Christians suddenly flying up into the air, leaving their clothing behind, to make a point. The point was that in every age as we strain to know what some of these future events that Christ is speaking about are going to look like, the odds that we'll be correct are small. What I spoke about concerning the Rapture is the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century version of it. But certainly, such a visual as that one had never before that time existed, and likely in a few years or decades from now it will change again. While some amount of modest speculation about the actual manifestations of these several End Times events such as the Rapture is only human, we must be cautious not to mix those speculations with biblical fact. Nor should we expand too much upon the frustratingly little biblical detail provided about the End Times in a way that seals our expectations in stone such that when those events finally do occur, we risk rejecting them because they don't fit our preconceptions. That is exactly what Yeshua had been battling since the beginning of His earthly ministry. The Jews of His day had drawn mental images derived from evolving

Traditions about the Messiah, and out of that came their messianic expectations, and for the most part they had it wrong. So, when God's Messiah did arrive... something they desperately wanted and prayed for... most of them could not accept it. Let's be careful that we don't do likewise.

Back in verse 3 the questioning Disciple asks Christ WHEN the things of the End Times will begin to happen and what the SIGN of them will be so that people can know. Yeshua responds as He always does with first things, first. Most importantly, He says, is to "Watch out and don't be fooled", and then goes on to explain why and how people ARE going to be fooled and run after false Messiahs and false Prophets. Further He explains what are NOT the signs of the End; such things as wars and famines, nations fighting against one another, ethnicities battling one another, earthquakes and other calamities all around the world. Persecutions, even murder, of Believers in Yeshua will be part of it. But none of these are the signs that the End has come.

Thus, much of chapter 24 is spent laying out what does and does not signal the End Times, and that Believers are to be hyper-vigilant not so much about world events (which Yeshua says are but inevitable distractions) but rather about the rise of false Messiahs and false Prophets.

Magicians (the stage kind, not the spiritual charlatans), in revealing how they accomplish such pleasing tricks, will all tell us that while we are focused on what his one hand is doing, it is the other that is the important one. The one hand that grabs our attention is really but a feint... a distraction... so that we don't see what is really going on with the other. It works because of how human brains work, and how we process and filter what our senses take in. This is a good illustration of what Yeshua is getting at; all these noisy and scary events will absorb our attention; but in reality, they are just a distraction. What we really need to be watchful for are the false Messiahs and false Prophets who, like politicians will say, never let a good crisis go to waste. False Messiahs and false Prophets thrive on such opportunities, preying on our fears and worries, and can ruin our spiritual lives by filling our minds with wrong information, wrong thoughts, wrong expectations; and very quickly we find ourselves putting our faith in a god or a deliverer of their or our own making; a god that isn't the God and Messiah of the Bible. This can be most difficult to recover from once we head down that road, which is why Yeshua is so concerned about it.

By the time we get to verse 24, Yeshua is still warning about how from the

1<sup>st</sup> century onward Believers will be faced with all sorts of distractions and charlatans, and tells us how we can avoid being taken in and thus perhaps even removing ourselves from membership in the Kingdom without realizing what our choices have done. My final words of our previous lesson were that I would tell you how you can be inoculated against the virus of deception as these false Prophets and false Messiahs come and go. Yeshua deals with just that in these verses. Let's re-read a short section.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 24:23 - 28**

Christ says we are not to pay any attention to someone who excitedly and sincerely tells us that the Messiah has returned and he's over here or over there. And in fact, there will be unusual men who can do what they say they can do; impossible things that can only be taken as miracles. It's not just that we're not to fall for it as a work of God; it's that we are to dismiss even the person who tells us that the Messiah has come and tells us who he is and where he is, because that person is dangerously deceived. Let's think about this for a moment: is it going to be pagans and those who clearly don't worship the God of Israel telling others that the Messiah has arrived? Of course not. These folks aren't looking for a Messiah; something they know nothing about. It is ONLY going to be Christians and Jews who will be the deceived and some will become the deceivers. In our time there is a man, Rabbi Schneerson, whom many Orthodox Jews believe is the Messiah, even though he died in 1994. Yet those who are most devoted to him believe that he'll return to them. He led the large Jewish sect called Chabad; but the belief that he was Messiah was not accepted by all its members and so this caused an acrimonious split of Chabad. So, the sort of thing Yeshua is speaking about is not hypothetical or unlikely.

In Yeshua's era within normal conversation, the term prophet meant anything from a teacher of God's written Word to a seer of the future. In fact, in the New Testament the term prophet is regularly applied to those who interpret and teach the Holy Scriptures. This is how we should understand it. So, in our day if Yeshua were standing among us, He would use the term prophet mostly meaning Bible teachers, Pastors and Rabbis unless He was speaking about a particular biblical Prophet or prophecy. What is a false Prophet? Generally speaking, we should understand that as meaning a Bible teacher, a Pastor or a Rabbi that misrepresents God or His Word. This is not about simple unintended error or accidentally saying one word when another is meant (something that everyone who teaches God's Word will do from time to time). This is about those who are

(or claim to be) God-worshippers that either knowingly teach doctrines of men as though they were commands of God, or they teach from God's Word but intentionally don't do so truthfully in order to fulfill an agenda. Where the line falls between ignorance and a willful intention to teach falsely in God's eyes I don't know; but I do know that God holds prophets to a higher standard of accuracy and truth than He does for listeners, students, and laymen.

In fact, says Jesus in verse 24, the things said and done by these false Prophets and false Messiahs will be so amazing that even the chosen would be fooled... if possible. "If possible". So why can't it be possible for the elect to be fooled if that is exactly the people Yeshua is warning? To begin, some of your Bibles won't say "the chosen" but rather will say "the elect". I want to be careful not to over-analyze these 2 terms and find a distinction without a difference; but when we turn to Mark 13 verse 20, we find both the words chosen and elected used. The first (chosen) is the Greek work **eklektos** and the second is the Greek word **eklego** (elect). Clearly these are 2 related terms but they do have slight differences in meaning. **Eklektos** seems to refer to the status of a group while **eklego** seems to refer to the individual whom God selected. In Matthew 24:24 the Greek word is **eklektos**... so the status of that group is "the chosen". Therefore, my interpretation is that to say that even the group of Believers could be deceived, if possible, is to refer to the congregation of Believers... the chosen group... as opposed to individual Believers that were selected to become part of the group.

While this may not answer, yet, why it is not possible to fool the **eklektos**... the group of Believers... it seems to me that Yeshua is building on what was said in the Torah in the Book of Deuteronomy, which effectively deals with the same matter.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Deuteronomy 13:1-6** *"Everything I am commanding you, you are to take care to do. Do not add to it or subtract from it. <sup>2</sup> "If a prophet or someone who gets messages while dreaming arises among you and he gives you a sign or wonder, <sup>3</sup> and the sign or wonder comes about as he predicted when he said, 'Let's follow other gods, which you have not known; and let us serve them,' <sup>4</sup> you are not to listen to what that prophet or dreamer says. For ADONAI your God is testing you, in order to find out whether you really do love ADONAI your God with all your heart and being. <sup>5</sup> You are to follow ADONAI your God, fear him, obey his mitzvot, listen to what he says, serve him and cling to him; <sup>6</sup> and that prophet or dreamer is to be put to death;*

***because he urged rebellion against ADONAI your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from a life of slavery; in order to seduce you away from the path ADONAI your God ordered you to follow. This is how you are to rid your community of this wickedness.***

Notice the final words in this passage that speak of ridding the community of wickedness. What precedes those final words, then, concerns the community as a whole... as a group... as opposed to selected individuals. In the Torah, Israel is the ***eklektos***... the chosen group. And just as Jesus warns in Matthew, also in Deuteronomy God says there will be false prophets that arise among Israel that will do miracles (give signs and wonders), and when they do (when they grab everyone's attention) some of them might even say to follow and serve other gods. Who will these false prophets be? Pagans? Gentiles? Outsiders? Heavens, no! They will be Israelites because they will have some amount of standing among their brethren that they would even bother to listen to them in the first place. However, says Deuteronomy 13:5, if you will obey God's commandments (the Law of Moses) and serve the God of the Torah, then you will see through a false prophet because what he says won't match God's Word. That is, God's Word is the standard to measure everything else by. Even more, God says we are to take these false prophets (those who teach things that go against the Torah) and put them to death because this is the only way to purge such dangerous wickedness from the community (from the ***eklektos***... from the chosen group). So how do we apply and use Matthew 24:24 and Deuteronomy 13:1 - 6 in our time? Obviously, in our day, we can't put a false Bible teacher, Rabbi or Pastor, to death. But... we can know God's Word, and cling to it, and thus discern when we are hearing false words of men. And when we follow doctrines of men that virtually countermand the Words of God, and in the so doing still claim we are following God, we are living in a deception. We have given ourselves over to a false god... a god we have not known. Why is that? Because false doctrines of men can ONLY teach us to construct and follow a god of our own imagining that by definition is not the God of the Bible no matter how wonderful, lovely, satisfying and spiritual sounding those doctrines might be.

I can only conclude then, that the truly chosen group... the ***eklektos***... are those who don't just claim God, but know God and His Word, and obey it. For these, it is not possible to be fooled. Knowing God's Word and shunning the doctrines of men are the active ingredients in the vaccine to prevent us from being infected with deception. Knowing God's Word means to trust and obey His Word from Genesis to Revelation. There can be no part of God's Word that we can set aside

because then God's Word is incomplete and it opens us up to deceptions that claim to fill in the gaps. Those whom God has chosen are more than those who only claim trust in Jesus; they (we) must sincerely believe His Word and actively obey it. Otherwise, we are going to be deceived and false beliefs will likely prevent us from being part of the chosen.

If this doesn't convict you in your spirit to get serious about knowing God's Word... from beginning to end... and obeying it... then if nothing else I hope it scares you into it out of self preservation.

Verse 25 continues with where we should NOT look for Christ when He returns. He says don't search for Him in the desert or in a secret room. The idea being expressed here is not about a list of specific places to not look for him if someone says that's where He is. Rather it is that His return is going to be public and highly visible. Don't listen to rumors. Rather His return will be like lightning flashing across the sky; everyone that is looking up cannot avoid seeing it. In fact, even those not looking will notice it because the light is so brilliant and the thunder so loud. Although it can be tempting to try to draw some hints or mysterious meanings from the phrase "like lightning that flashes out of the east and fills the sky to the western horizon", I don't think it is there to flesh out. Yeshua is making a simple metaphor that ought not be overly analyzed. His return can be compared to lightning and thunder that is impossible to miss whether it is a welcome and expected event or not.

His return will be so unlike His first coming when He came into this world privately and quietly, born in the guest area of a house. The celestial sign of His arrival was a star that moved silently through the night sky and only a few even noticed it. A handful of local shepherds in the tiny rural town of Bethlehem were treated to a chorus of angels announcing the coming of their Messiah; but that was the extent of those who immediately knew of this world changing event. But when Jesus returns, at the least the entire land of Israel will learn of it all at once, and perhaps the extended region or even the whole planet will witness it.

Next Christ says something that must be an expression rather than some kind of a prophecy. He says that where ever there's a dead body you'll find vultures. That's cheery. As with the lightning metaphor, this is another illustration using something known and obvious. If something dies out in the open, it is inevitable that very quickly vultures will be circling overhead. Conversely when you see vultures circling overhead, clearly there's something dead laying on the ground.



Death and vultures are inseparable companions and one doesn't have to look for an alternate reason for their presence. After this, Yeshua begins a new phase of His End Times instruction. Let's read a little more.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 24:29 - 35**

After describing what Christ says is "the trouble" of those days (meaning everything that He's warned of up until now), something else will happen. That is, now that the End Times is underway, here's what happens next.

The CJB says "the trouble of those days"; nearly all other English translations say "the tribulation" of those days. I don't want to pound the drum too loudly with something we've already covered, but the words "the tribulation"... even though the definite article "the" is present in this case... doesn't mean it in the sense of a set apart and named event. It's more like saying "the pain I'm in". The pain is not a set apart and named event; it's just common English grammar and syntax explaining you are in pain. The point is that Jesus is announcing the coming climax of the end of this stage of Redemption history. This means that the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven to its completion is about to happen. The entrance into the 1000-year reign of Christ is about to begin with all the people in the world under the government of Yeshua, and so at least for a time the only people left alive will be righteous God-Worshippers.

Here is some food for thought: the length of the time of suffering (tribulation) that Jesus says that the Father is going to cut short, is left unspecified. It might be that the Daniel timeline where he speaks rather cryptically about weeks of years, and a time, and times, and half a time might come into play here concerning this period of suffering and affliction. Our own Baruch Korman of Seed of Abraham's Lovelsrael.org ministry makes a good case that it does (so I recommend that you listen to his teaching on the subject). Yet this is another item that some Believers are so certain can be counted down nearly to the second when it begins and ends; I am skeptical about it. In defense of my position on this, in just a few more verses Yeshua says that He doesn't know when God will return Him. And since His return is directly timed to the end of this indeterminate period of tribulation (suffering and affliction) it seems to me that if Daniel's timeline was meant to directly correlate to this, then Christ wouldn't express such a lack of knowledge on the timing of the sequence. But, you be the judge of it.

Verse 29 continues with what some Bible scholars say is a paraphrase of the

Prophet Joel, but I see it more as a conflation of several biblical prophecies (including Joel) that Yeshua has borrowed from that no doubt remind those He's speaking to of some of those ancient prophecies. Here's a small sampling:

**CJB Isaiah 13:10** *For the stars, the constellations in the sky, will no longer give their light; the sun will be dark when it rises; and the moon will no longer shine.*

**CJB Joel 2:10** *At their advance the earth quakes, and the sky shakes, the sun and moon turn black, and the stars stop shining.*

**CJB Amos 8:9** *"When that time comes," says Adonai ELOHIM, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.*

Later John will echo the same prophecies.

**CJB Revelation 6:12** *Then I watched as he broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, the sun turned black as sackcloth worn in mourning, and the full moon became blood-red.*

There are additional prophetic passages as well that express the same idea. Just as earlier we're told that Yeshua's return will be seen by all in a way that people will understand either their doom or their deliverance has just arrived (even if it's little more than an emotion or an instinct among the doomed), so will the workings of the entire cosmos herald Yeshua's reappearance and the end of the age. Whether the happenings in the sky occur immediately upon Yeshua's coming, shortly after, or as a sign of it we probably can't know; but regardless of a precise or serial sequence we can say that these several events happen in concert. Paul takes this teaching of Christ a step further and no doubt he also incorporates thoughts that the Jewish intellectuals and teachers had taught him long before he knew Jesus. We read about it in the Book of Romans.

**CJB Romans 8:19-23** <sup>19</sup> *The creation waits eagerly for the sons of God to be revealed;* <sup>20</sup> *for the creation was made subject to frustration- not willingly, but because of the one who subjected it. But it was given a reliable hope* <sup>21</sup> *that it too would be set free from its bondage to decay and would enjoy the freedom accompanying the glory that God's children will have.* <sup>22</sup> *We know that until now, the whole creation has been groaning as with the pains of childbirth;* <sup>23</sup> *and not only it, but we ourselves, who have*



***the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we continue waiting eagerly to be made sons- that is, to have our whole bodies redeemed and set free.***

Truly the longer God allows me to live I cannot help but notice that all Creation is bound up together as one great, integrated unit (which is really the meaning behind our calling the vastness of space and all that exists a Universe). All of God's Creation... spiritual and physical... energy and matter... was by design made interdependent to work co-operatively in perfect harmony. Therefore, all its parts and elements also suffer together, as a unit. This is not to say that humans aren't different from rocks and trees and even stars and energy in a hierarchy of purpose and importance to God. But over time science has coined terms like ecosystem to explain their recognition of a clear interdependence of entire systems of life, any part of which if interrupted affects the whole. Paul, kind of a 1<sup>st</sup> century combination of C.S. Lewis and Sir Isaac Newton, recognized this reality, and that God through the ancient Prophets had spoken about the Universe in terms of mysterious interactions, and so decay and thus finite longevity of the Universe is directly tied to the fall of human kind into sin and death. What happens with man affects the Universe, and what happens with the Universe affects man. Thus, it is to be expected that as wickedness reaches its zenith on earth, and as Christ returns to purge the earth of it, it means that as a new chapter of Redemption History approaches of course the cosmos will participate in it as well.

Verse 30 continues with Yeshua using thoughts from the ancient Prophets by saying that when the Son of Man appears (when Christ returns in awesome and terrifying fashion), all the tribes of the Land will mourn. Most English versions say that "all the tribes of the earth will mourn". There are two distinct and different meanings that we have to decide between. The term "the Land" is a common one in the Bible that is shorthand for the Land of Israel. So, is this saying that the tribes of Israel are going to mourn or that all the tribes of all people all over the earth are going to mourn? While not a precise quote, Christ's statement is no doubt taken from Zechariah 12.

***CJB Zechariah 12:10 and I will pour out on the house of David and on those living in Yerushalayim a spirit of grace and prayer; and they will look to me, whom they pierced." They will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son; they will be in bitterness on his behalf like the bitterness for a firstborn son.***

We also find that John in the Book of Revelation uses this same thought.

**CJB Revelation 1:7 *Look! He is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him, including those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the Land will mourn him. Yes! Amen!***

Although the Greek word that is alternately translated as land or earth is **ge**, which can rightly be interpreted either way, why would tribes of people all over the earth that have no interest in the Jew Yeshua (and that will represent the majority of people on the planet), mourn over Him? So, these tribes that mourn must be referring to the tribes of the Land of Israel; not people all over the world.

While this mourning among the 12 tribes will be universal, the reason for the mourning will not be. Those Israelites that have been trusting in Yeshua will mourn over the circumstances of His death when their very own people were complicit in it. The remaining Israelites that to this moment have refused to accept their Messiah will mourn because their own fates of judgment and the Lake of Fire have been sealed. Thus, it can be said that all the Tribes of Israel will, without exception, mourn over Him.

Verse 30 continues with Yeshua remembering Daniel's vision about the coming of the Son of the Man.

**CJB Daniel 7:13 *"I kept watching the night visions, when I saw, coming with the clouds of heaven, someone like a son of man. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence.***

As part of this incomparable event, "He" will send out angels with a great shofar; and with that blast the angels will go to gather His chosen from the four winds... meaning from the entire planet. If the "He" is Jesus (and it hard to take it any other way), then it seems that He has charge over at least some of the hosts of Heaven. Later He will reaffirm His command over angels as He hangs on the execution stake. It will be at the sound of the shofar that the angels are assembled and set into motion. The Greek word that the CJB translates as shofar but almost all of English translations say is trumpet, is **salpigx**. Indeed, it literally translates to trumpet. However, David Sterns is right that the better translation is probably shofar (Greek has no word for shofar so translates it to trumpet).

When Israel was ready to go into battle, a ram's horn... a shofar... was used as a signal. A trumpet was used in the Temple ritual, played by Levites as a musical instrument. So, a shofar was the equivalent of a bugle that was used in the days when there were horse soldiers. Different sounding blasts meant for the troops to do different things. The use of a shofar here also helps to make clear the meaning at the beginning of the verse about the SIGN of the Son of Man. What is the sign? Some commentators say that the appearance of the Son of Man is itself the sign. Some of the fairly early Church Fathers said the sign was a Christian Cross that would appear in the sky when Christ returned. The reality is that because this scene is the beginning of the battle of Yeshua to purge the world of all the wicked powers and governments, then this must have a biblical war motif in mind.

A shofar was used in conjunction with a battle flag. Sometimes a battle flag in the Bible is called an ensign, at other times a banner, and sometimes it is translated to "sign" like it is here. A battle flag worked similarly to a shofar in that it was used as a signaling system to the troops; such as which troops needed to assemble where. In far more ancient times, each of Israel's tribes had their own banner or ensign, and no doubt it was used sometimes to tell where those particular tribal members were to assemble for battle (in a tribal culture, a tribe usually fought as single battle unit). Thus this scene is of the angels going to battle at Jesus's call, being signaled to assemble by the use of an ensign (a sign) and a shofar. But who are the chosen people that are going to be assembled by the angels?

Despite what I've just told you, by Jesus's day tribalism among Israel had all but ended. Israel was no longer being assembled tribe by tribe, for battle. The 12 Tribes were dispersed, tribalism had morphed into nationalism, and the tribes battling foes alongside one another was a thing of the distant pass. So it may be that while the ensign and the shofar are what Matthew intended to bring to mind for his Jewish audience, it could as easily be (and I think this is the case) that for Jews in casual conversation the terms trumpet and shofar had ceased to have much difference except as regarded Temple ritual. So it might be that we don't want to get too picky over whether we ought to demand that the term in our passage is shofar as opposed to trumpet.

As for the chosen people. Here I think the CJB has taken too great of liberties. The term used is **eklektos** just as Christ was talking about a little earlier. No doubt in the **P'shat** sense this can only be talking about the tribes of Israel (and this is how His disciples would have understood it); however, in the **Remez** this

expands to (in time) include gentile Believers. Notice I said **include** and not gentile Believers replacing Israelites. My reading of prophecy is that the gathering of the 12 tribes of Israel from around the world is a long process that occurs prior to the return of Messiah; so, this is something that ought to have already happened by the time of Yeshua's return. Yet this gathering of the chosen also seems to include all those that will fight alongside and along with Yeshua. We'll get into all that in a later lesson.

I want to shift for just few minutes to the use of the trumpet or shofar at the return of Messiah Yeshua. We have learned that this is going to have direct relationship to the prophetic, messianic significance of the 7 biblical feasts of the Torah. We have found that, not coincidentally, all the major works of redemption by Yeshua have happened upon one of those feast days, and in a specific order. In fact, by the final chapter of Matthew, of the 7 biblical feasts 4 of them will have been prophetically fulfilled: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and the Feast of Weeks (that in English is better known as Pentecost). Literally and precisely, Christ died on Passover, went into the grave on Unleavened Bread, and arose on Firstfruits. Next, 50 days later, the Holy Spirit came to indwell Believers on the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).

This means that there are 3 feasts remaining to have their redemptive messianic prophetic meanings fulfilled: The Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and the final feast Sukkot or the Feast of Booths. What did we just read about? Trumpets (perhaps shofars) being blown to signal Yeshua's long awaited return, accompanied with hosts of angels. Might this be the fulfillment of the meaning of the Feast of Trumpets? As with all prophetic fulfillments that are yet to happen, it is wisest to hold lightly what we think they are going to look like. However, what we learn from the first 4 prophetic feast fulfillments is that in imitation of how closely together they are scheduled in the Hebrew calendar, so were they fulfilled. It took just 4 days for the Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits feasts to be totally fulfilled and then only a wait of 50 days before the 4<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), to be fulfilled. There has been a 2000-year dormancy as we wait for the 5<sup>th</sup> of those feasts to be fulfilled.

Biblically, the final 3 feasts begin within a short span of 15 days of one another. Therefore, I think these final redemptive events involving Yeshua will also begin within 15 days of one another and happen precisely on those feast days. So, when the clock hits 12 and these things begin to unfold, it's going to

happen at lightening speed. Unless one is well prepared before it starts, no one will have the time to figure it out. Soon Jesus will use some Parables to make this exact point.

We'll continue in Matthew 24 next time.