



The Olivet Discourse

"when you see all these things, know that it is near-- at the doors!"
(Matthew 24:33)

Note: Scripture used in this Bible Study is from the New King James Version.

Are there any prophetic signs that must take place prior to the rapture?

No, the rapture is imminent, it is the next major event on God's prophetic clock.

If the rapture is imminent, why then do we bother to study about the tribulation that takes place after the rapture?

We can see the stage being set for the tribulation which reinforces for all who have spiritual discernment how close we are to the Lord's return.

What do we know about to whom the book of Matthew was written?

The book of Matthew was written originally to the Jews so that they may come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

How should the intended audience of the Book of Matthew impact they way we study the Olivet Discourse?

We need to keep in mind that the Olivet Discourse is directed primarily to Jewish believers and thus we should keep in mind that the emphasis is on the time of Jacob's trouble which we know as the tribulation.

1. Matthew 24:1-2 - What did Jesus prophesy about the temple in Jerusalem?

1 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple.

2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Jesus prophesied that the temple would be destroyed: *"not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*

Did this prophecy of the temple come to pass?

Yes, the armies of the Roman general Titus laid siege to Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The Romans burned the temple then destroyed it looking for gold that had melted between the stones in the fire.

2. Matthew 24:3 - What three questions did the disciples ask Jesus?

3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

- (1) When will the temple be destroyed?
- (2) What will be the sign of Your coming?
- (3) What will be the sign of the end of the age?

3. Matthew 24:3 - What assumption were the disciples making by the way they asked these questions?

The disciples asked these three questions together so they must have assumed that all three would happen at the same time.

4. Matthew 24:4-6 - Which questions did Jesus answer?

4 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you.

5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

6 "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

Jesus addressed the times leading up to the end of the age which, we'll find, also correspond with Christ's return. He didn't specifically address when the temple would be destroyed but instead focused on the weightier matters of His coming and the end of the age.

Preterits believe all the prophecies in Matthew have been fulfilled. How can they believe that and what problems does this belief have?

Preterits believe that the events associated with destruction of the temple in 70 AD fulfilled the prophecies of Matthew 24. But to believe this you must spiritualize (apply an interpretive spiritual meaning to) the Bible since these prophecies were not literally fulfilled. The destruction of the temple was a type of the tribulation but it did not literally fulfill the prophecy since Jesus has not literally returned.

This is probably a good place to describe the three major views of the order of the major end-time events:

Amillennial – These believe the present age of Christ's rule in the church is the millennium spoken of in Revelation. They hold to one resurrection and judgment marking the end

of history as we know it and the beginning of life eternal. They don't believe in a literal rapture of the church.

Post Millennial – These believe that Christ will return after a long period of expansion and spiritual prosperity for the church brought about by the preaching of the gospel, the Spirit's blessing, and the church's work toward righteousness, justice, and peace. The period is not a literal 1000 years but an extended time of prosperity. They too do not believe in a literal rapture of the church.

Premillennial – These believe that Christ will physically return to end the battle of Armageddon and literally rule on earth for 1000 years. There are two primary views on the timing of the rapture among Premillennialists: a pretribulational rapture (Dispensational Premillennialists) and a mid or post-tribulational rapture (Historical Premillennialists).

Amillennialists and Post Millennialists are also known as preterits believing that the prophecies about the tribulation have already been fulfilled in history. Preterits believe that the church has replaced Israel in God's economy, that all the promises God made to Israel now apply to the church.

How do you respond to the view that all the promises God made to Israel now apply to the church?

Certainly the church is spiritual Israel but as Gentiles, we have been grafted in, Israel is represented by the natural branches that will be grafted back in during the end-times, see Romans 11, especially verses 25 and 26.

Another indicator that someone is a preterit is when they make a big deal about being a "New Testament Church." Certainly all churches are New Testament Churches but what people often mean by this is that they do not study the Old Testament at all. After all, if all the Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled, why bother?

5. Matthew 24:4-5 - What did Jesus warn of?

Jesus warned that there will be deceptions before He returns.

6. Matthew 24:5 - What primary deception did Jesus warn us about?

Jesus warned us that many will come in His name claiming to be Him.

Are there instances of people claiming to be Christ today? What are they?

- Cult leaders like David Koresh of the Branch Davidians (a sect of the Seventh Day Adventists) claim to be Christ.
- New Agers say, "you can be your own Christ." They also say, "Jesus was only an enlightened person & an example of what we can become." Jesus' prophecy

that, "*many will come... will deceive many,*" is certainly seen in the New Age lie which is not really new: "*ye shall be as gods*" (Genesis 3:5)

- These instances of false christs are but foreshadowings of what it will be like during the tribulation.

We know what wars are, what is a rumor of war?

- It could be the threat of war like we had during the "cold war." During the cold war we conducted operations as if we were at war and this is still going on to a certain extent today with having nuclear weapons at the ready.
- But most likely this refers to hearing about war in a far off place that doesn't effect you. There are so many wars today and global communications are so routine that these rumors of war are a feature of the age we live in.

7. Matthew 24:6 - How should Christians react to "wars and rumors of wars"?

Christians should not be troubled by wars and rumors of war.

Why shouldn't Christians be troubled by "wars and rumors of wars"?

- Wars and rumors of wars are not signs the end has started yet, they simply precede the time of the end of the world as we now know it. Wars are but the beginning of the end.
- Also, Christians who come to Christ before the end of the Age of Grace will be spared having to suffer through the tribulation (we'll delve more into why this is later).
- A remnant of Jewish believers will be supernaturally protected through the tribulation.

What will cause the world as we now know it to end?

When Jesus returns, He will personally rule the nations of the world. Much of creation will be restored to the way it was prior to man's sin in the Garden of Eden. This is but a foreshadowing of the recreation God will work at the beginning of the eternal state. (See my study on heaven where it discusses the millennial reign of Christ.)

8. Matthew 24:7 - What five parts are given to "the sign of Your coming"?

- 7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.
- (1) nation will rise against nation
 - (2) kingdom against kingdom
 - (3) famines - starving, food shortages
 - (4) pestilences - disease
 - (5) earthquakes

Is the use of "nation" and "kingdom" redundant in this passage? What is the difference between "nation" and "kingdom"?

No. The word "nation" in the Greek is *ethnos* meaning a multitude, people, race, belonging & living together. The word "kingdom" in the Greek is *basileia* meaning dominion, realm, a people in a territory being governed.

Haven't we always had these signs? What then makes them signs?

We have always had nations rising up against nations, famines and earthquakes. The key to seeing these things as signs is seen in verse 8...

9. Matthew 24:8 - What time frame is given for the five signs Jesus gave?

"All these are the beginning of sorrows."

The Greek word translated into "sorrows" is "odin" which means birth pains. The apostle Paul also spoke of events preceding the return of Christ as birth pains...

1Thessalonians 5:2-3 - 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.

What is significant about the onset of birth pains? How would the timing of the contractions be characterized?

Birth pains increase in intensity and frequency, as time goes on they become more painful and more often.

As birth pains become of greater intensity and frequency, what is the culmination of them?

Birth pains culminate in the birth itself which is continuous intense pain followed by relief when it is all over. The result of these birth pangs will be Christ returning to restore order and set up His literal kingdom on earth. Likewise, the intensity and frequency of world-shaking events like the Gulf war and the September 11th terrorist attack will occur more frequently until it is continuous during the tribulation.

- The prophet Daniel also described the rate to which end time events would begin to unfold in Daniel 9:26, *"the end of it shall be with a flood"*.

10. Matthew 24:9-14 - What period is described by these verses?

9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

10 "And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

11 "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

12 "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

13 "But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 14:9-14 describes the tribulation.

11. Matthew 24:9 - Who will be delivered into tribulation?

Israel as a nation will go through the tribulation. Note that this message was primarily to the Jews. The Bible is given to us through the Jewish prophets, Jesus Himself came as a Jew, and this is why He came, to bring the message of the kingdom of heaven to the Jews:

Matt 15:24 - "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

How do you reconcile the fact that Jesus came to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel with His dying so that all people, Jew and Gentile would be saved?

There is no real conflict that needs reconciling here. God chose the Jews to be his spokesmen to the world. Jesus did come to bring salvation to all people but this message was communicated through the Jews. Note that all the disciples were Jews, Paul was a Jew, Jesus Himself was a Jew. While there is application in the Olivet Discourse message to all people, it was delivered to the Jews and thus has the most direct application to them.

12. Matthew 24:9-14 - What things do these verses say will happen during the tribulation?

- (1) Jews and people who follow Christ will be hated & killed by all nations
- (2) people will betray and hate one another
- (3) false prophets will deceive many
- (4) lawlessness will abound causing love to grow cold.
- (5) The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world

13. Matthew 24:9-14 - Have these things ever been fulfilled in history?

- No... Jews & Christians have been killed for their beliefs but not by all nations at the same time.
- The gospel has not been preached in all the world. Even with radio and the Internet, some are missed and most who are not missed are not listening. This verse will be completely fulfilled in the midst of the tribulation...

Revelation 14:6-7 - Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth-- to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people-- saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of

His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

14. Matthew 24:13 - What will happen to those who endure to the end?

Those who endure to the end will be saved.

Does this enduring to the end mean that people will earn their salvation during this period?

No, trusting in the Lord is still the prerequisite for salvation but those who are saved need to endure the tribulation to be part of His kingdom on earth.

What will those who endure be saved from & to?

Those who endure will be saved from the tribulation, to the millennial kingdom with Jesus as the King (i.e. they will enter the kingdom).

15. Matthew 24:15 - What is the event described in this verse? (see also Daniel 9:27, 11:31, & 12:11)

Matthew 24:15 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),

Dan 9:27 - Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."

Dan 11:31 - And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.

Dan 12:11 - And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.

- These verses all refer to the "*abomination of desolation.*"

What does the "abomination of desolation" mean?

- The word abomination means horrible and revolting deeds against God. The word desolation refers to an event that devastates God's people.
- The abomination of desolation replaces the daily sacrifice and desecrates the temple, probably the setting up an image of the Antichrist to be worshipped instead of God. (see Rev 13:14-15)

So what must be in place for the great tribulation to occur?

The temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt with the daily sacrifices being conducted. Note that there has to be a

temple in Jerusalem for the Jews to resume their sacrifices per Daniel 9:27.

Can the tribulation begin without the temple in Jerusalem?

Yes, the 70th week of Daniel begins with the Antichrist confirming a treaty with Israel which probably enables them to have a temple. To fulfill Scripture, the temple only needs to be in place at the mid-point of the tribulation.

Does it seem likely today that there will be a Jewish temple in Jerusalem?

No, in today's political climate this seems impossible. However, it also seemed impossible for Israel to become a nation prior to 1948. God is in the business of making the seemingly impossible happen. Certainly there are signs that some in Israel want a temple. This is seen by an increasing number of Israelis as a symbol of their nation and viewed by many Jews as being necessary for the Messiah to come (which is true). The Temple Institute in Jerusalem is getting ready for that day.

16. Matthew 24:16-20 - What does Jesus tell the Jews living at the time to do?

16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

17 "Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house.

18 "And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

19 "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

20 "And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

- Jesus is telling the Jews who will be in Jerusalem at the time of the abomination of desolation to flee the city - do not even pause to take anything out of the house or change clothes but to move quickly.

How do we know Jesus is referring to Jews?

- verse 16: "those who are in Judea"
- verse 20: the Sabbath would mean religious Jews would be inclined to stay home

17. Matthew 24:21 - What does our Lord call this new phase of the tribulation?

"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."

Jesus calls the part of the tribulation that occurs after the abomination of desolation the "great tribulation."

18. Matthew 24:21 - What will make this period so terrible?

The great tribulation will be worse than ever has "*been since the beginning of the world*" or "*ever shall be.*"

19. Matthew 24:22 - What will there be a lot of during the great tribulation?

And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

There will be a lot of death during the great tribulation. The book of Revelation gives details about the tribulation: In one war, the "Sixth Trumpet War", 1/3 of mankind will die by a 200 million-man army from the East.

When in history has the Earth's population been such that a 200 million man army could be fielded?

China has the world's largest standing army, approx. 200 million men today when taking into account their reservists!

When in history has it been possible for a war to kill all people on earth?

- Not even World War II threatened the world's population, but our modern weapons of mass-destruction now can (nuclear, chemical, biological).
- It can only be our era Jesus is referring to concerning His return when He said, *"And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved."*

20. Matthew 24:22 - Why will the Lord intervene to end this terrible time?

Jesus will end the great tribulation *"for the elect's sake."*

Who are the elect that Jesus is referring to here?

The elect are God's people, those who come to faith in Jesus Christ during the tribulation who God has chosen to go into the Kingdom age.

21. Matthew 24:23-25 - What will deceive people during the tribulation?

23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it.

24 "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

25 "See, I have told you beforehand.

Jesus said that there would be great signs and wonders during the tribulation, God will allow demon-possessed people to perform supernatural feats...

2 Thess 2:9-11 - The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,

As an example, the false prophet described in Revelation causes people to worship the beast (a.k.a. Antichrist)...

Rev 13:13 - He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.

How was Hitler a type of the Antichrist?

Hitler was so much like we expect the Antichrist to be that many Christians thought he was. Certainly Hitler sought to rule the world and he hated God's people seeking to exterminate them.

As a type of the Antichrist, what can we learn about the Antichrist from the way Hitler conducted his business?

I believe that Hitler manner of deception was right out of Satan's playbook and thus provides a preview of the strategy of the Antichrist for deceiving people... Josef Goebbels, the Nazi minister of propaganda called Hitler's approach to deception the "technique of the Big Lie." Hitler describe his technique in *Mein Kampf*, writing, "in the primitive simplicity of their minds, they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods. It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. Even though the facts which prove this to be so may be brought clearly to their minds, they still doubt and waiver and will continue to think there must be some other explanation."

What is the big lie that the world has accepted?

The worldly mind does not want to accept the idea that men are basically sinful, deserving of hell... if they did, they would have to confront their own sin but they have chosen not to. It is important to note that Hitler, the Antichrist and Satan know how to take advantage of the worldly mind.

What evidence have you seen that the spirit of the antichrist is active in the world today?

There are many things that prove this to be true. I found a little article in the Parade Magazine of the Houston Chronicle June 23, 2002 titled "Words of Hate Find New Fans." The article said that, "Adolf Hitler's 'Mein Kampf,' which provided a road map for Nazism is a best seller again. An Arabic translation published in Lebanon is being sold in the Middle East and on London's Edgware Road, home to a large Arab population. The German state of Bavaria, which owns most international copyrights to the 1925 book, is trying to stop its publication."

22. Matthew 24:26-27 - How will the Lord return to the earth?

26 "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it.

27 "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

The Lord will not return in secret but suddenly from heaven and publicly so all the world sees Him...

Matthew 24:29-30 - Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

It says in Acts 1:9-11 that Jesus will return the same way He left... What does this mean?

Acts 1:9-11 - Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Jesus will return to earth visibly, bodily, descending from heaven to the very place He ascended from...

Zechariah 14:4 - And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.

23. Matthew 24:28 - What will attract the birds when the Lord returns?

28 "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

With a preponderance of death will come many carcasses. The birds that feed on carrion will be agents of divine judgment. When the Lord comes again, He will come in judgment...

Rev 19:17-19 - Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he 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. And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

24. Matthew 24:29-30 - What five miracles will happen when the Lord returns?

29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

30 "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

1. the sun will be darkened
2. the moon will not give its light
3. the stars will fall from heaven
4. the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven
5. all the tribes of the earth will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory

Is Matthew 24:29-30 describing a supernatural event or something that can be explained by natural phenomena?

Certainly this could all be supernatural, God has acted supernaturally in history. But usually God uses natural means to bring about the result He is looking for. Most of the description in Matthew 24:29-30 could be brought about by a nuclear war. I think this is more likely because it gives those who have rejected a relationship with God a convenient explanation...

2 Thess 2:11-12 - And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

There is a parallel passage in Revelation which expands on the description of nuclear war...

Rev 6:12-15 - I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,

What do you think the sign of the Son of Man is?

Scripture is not clear on this, but whatever it is, people will know that it foreshadows the coming of the Lord. I think it will be supernatural, perhaps the Shekinah Glory of God in the heavens so bright that it penetrates the dust cloud of nuclear war which obscures the sun and moon. All people on earth will see the coming of the Lord so His sign is the Lord Himself when He first appears.

25. Matthew 24:30 - Why do the "tribes" mourn?

The tribes are the various Gentile races and nations... they realize Who they have rebelled against and that the time to repent has passed, the hour of reckoning is upon them.

26. Matthew 24:31 - Who are "the elect" of verse 31?

31 "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Some say the elect is the church but I agree with those who say it is Israel. The church will already and forever be with Christ and not need to be gathered by angels. We are called by Christ's voice which is like that of an archangel and meet him in the air, not angels (1Thess 4:16). Also, ministering angels have always been connected with Israel.

27. Matthew 24:32-33 - What does the fig tree & summer symbolize? (see Hosea 9:10)

32 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.
33 "So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near-- at the doors!

The fig tree is recognized by Bible scholars as a symbol of Israel...

Hosea 9:10 - "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season."

- See also Jeremiah 24 and Joel.

Jesus caused a fig tree that had leaves but bore no fruit to wither away in Matthew 21:18-19. This fig tree represented Israel having turned what God gave them into a lifeless ritual...

Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." And immediately the fig tree withered away."

What does "bearing fruit" in the Bible symbolize?

Doing things that glorify God and pay everlasting reward such as helping lead people to Christ. Note that Israel under the Law will never bear any fruit!

How long before the fig tree of Israel will bear fruit?

Revelation tells about the 144,000 witnesses who bear much fruit during the tribulation. The 144,000 are described as 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel (Rev 7:5-8) representing the whole of the nation of Israel. Note the result of the 144,000 witnesses...

Rev 7:9-14 - After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes,

with palm branches in their hands... These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

I understand that fig trees bear fruit very soon after you first see the leaves. Given this, what should one see with the leaves of Israel?

When Israel begins to put forth its leaves, we should see fruit. The time will come when Israel will again bear fruit.

When will Israel again bear fruit?

Israel will bear fruit during the tribulation just before Christ returns.

So, what does summer symbolize?

Summer represents the new season or age when Christ will physically rule on earth, the promised millennial kingdom.

If summer is the millennial reign of Christ, what would spring be?

Spring would be the time when the fig tree Israel begins to put forth its leaves as a precursor to fruit bearing.

What season is it before the fig tree's leaves begin to bud out?

It is winter before the leaves bud out.

What does a tree look like in winter without any leaves?

This may be hard for those who have spent their lives in tropical coastal Texas to visualize but any who have seen deciduous trees in the north during winter know that trees without leaves look dead.

What did Israel look like before 1948?

Before Israel became a nation in May 1948, it looked dead with no chance of ever being a nation again.

What was Israel like as a nation prior to 1948?

Prior to 1948, the Jewish people had been spread out all over the world without a nation of their own. In 70 AD their second temple was destroyed by the Romans as prophesied by Jesus and the Jewish people were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. This has been almost 1900 years (let's call it 2000 in round numbers)...

Has something like this ever happened in history before that a nation that has been dispersed comes back into their original land after hundreds of years?

No, this is totally unprecedented. History has shown that when nations are dispersed, they die. People who are displaced are assimilated into the local culture where they end up. The Hebrew people are unique in maintaining their national identity. It is also significant that this Diaspora, or dispersion, is prophesied in many places in the Bible. The Bible also makes clear in many places that Israel will be

brought back into Eretz Israel (the land of Israel) in the time just preceding the return of the Messiah. And it is also prophesied that once they are brought back into the land that they will be there forever...

Ezek 37:21-25 - Thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land... and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever

Hosea prophesied that Israel would be without a temple, king, or a nation for two days, but would be regathered by the Lord at the end of the two days:

Hosea 3:4-5 - For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.

Hosea 6:1-2 - Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; he has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.

What do you think the two days in Hosea 6:1-2 refers to?
Consider time from God's perspective...

2 Peter 3:8 - But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

This gives us pause when we realize one day is counted as a thousand years with God. It has been 2 days in round numbers since Israel was dispersed... we must be the generation Jesus spoke about that would see His return!

28. Matthew 24:34 - What generation is the Lord referring to?

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

The generation that sees Israel begin to bud out leaves as a nation will see Christ return.

Are we seeing Israel bud out leaves today?

This certainly depends on what you interpret the leaves on the fig tree to symbolize. Certainly Israel being back in the land as a nation is significant. If this is not the leaves of the fig tree then it certainly is at least the buds of the leaves.

So, how long is a generation?

When is the latest Christ is likely to come?

If a generation is 40 years as Israel was in the wilderness before going into the promised land, the Lord's return is overdue. A generation may well be the basic life span of a man since the time of the flood, 70 to 80 years (Psalm

90:10)? I can't help but think that there will be people alive during the time of the Lord's physical return to earth who were living during the time when the nation of Israel was formed.

I can see wheels turning as you are doing the math in your heads... what is the latest that it seems likely the Lord should come back?

- You can do the math and see how close we are. This is not date setting, it is recognizing that we are in the season of the Lord's return.
- If the Lord is going to come back in the generation that saw Israel reformed as a nation in their land within a 70-year life expectancy: $1948 + 70 = 2018$.
- We'll look at the sequence of end-time events later, but given that the rapture will occur at least 7 years prior to the Lord's physical return, we don't have long to persevere in this world.

29. Matthew 24:35 - What is temporary and what is permanent?

Matthew 24:35 - Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. God's Word is permanent, the current heaven and earth are temporary...

2 Pet 3:10 - 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.

Rev 21:1 - Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

What does it mean that God's Word will never pass away?

We will continue to study God's Word in eternity because it will continue to application to us even in the eternal state. These is a wonderful truth, this current life is but a shadow of the magnificent life to come.

30. Matthew 24:36 - Who knows when Christ will return?

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. Jesus said only God the Father knew when Christ would return.

If Jesus is God, why didn't He know when He was going to return?

Note that Jesus was speaking in the present tense here. Certainly Jesus knows when He will return now. But prior to His resurrection, Jesus had set aside many of His prerogatives as God so that He could perform His mission as a man and die to pay the penalty for our sins...

Philippians 2:5-8 - Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

While Jesus was here on earth, He was bound by time and so only revealed to us those things the Father wanted us to know.

Now a follow-up question to this would be, why didn't Jesus point out that the Holy Spirit knew when Christ would return?

This certainly gets into the nature of our Triune God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all have equal characteristics as God in their omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. So certainly the Holy Spirit has also always known when the Son would return. When Jesus said "My Father," He is referring to the Godhead which includes Himself as God the Son as well as the Holy Spirit.

When we get to our end-times chronology part of our study, we'll see that the coming of the Lord at the end of the tribulation is tied to a very specific event which marks the beginning of the tribulation, namely the Antichrist confirming a peace treaty which give a false peace to Israel (Daniel 9:27). There are several prophecies we will look at that give the exact time period between this event and the return of the Lord even to the very day.

Given that during the tribulation, believers will know the day of the Lord's return, how then can Jesus say that know one knows when He would return?

Again, Jesus was speaking in present tense. During the tribulation, all who study God's Word and are able to discern spiritual matters will know when the Lord will return. They'll be able to mark the day on a calendar. But we don't know now because the Antichrist has not emerged to confirm the peace treaty with Israel. Certainly there has been many foreshadowings of such a peace treaty but this one will be so significant that it permits Israel to build a temple in Jerusalem, something that seems impossible in today's political environment.

As we study the end-times chronology, we will see that God will give those who become Christians during the tribulation sufficient information to know when Jesus will return... Why didn't God reveal this to we who are living in this current age of grace?

It is God's will that we live our lives expecting Jesus to return at any moment. This is the doctrine of imminence, the rapture can occur at any time, there is no prophetic event that must precede it. Living with such an expectation helps

us walk closer to the Lord, living more holy lives which is His will for us.

Why would God tell the tribulation saints when Jesus would return?

God tells the tribulation saints when Jesus will return out of His grace... knowing that the tribulation is limited will help them make it through it. Jesus is literally the light at the end of the tunnel.

31. Matthew 24:37-38 - What will the days be like that preceding Christ's return?

37 "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

38 "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,

Two things stand out here that characterize the time prior to the Lord's return: (1) these days will be as the days of Noah were and (2) people will be carrying on their business as if nothing incredible was about to happen (eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage).

What were the days of Noah like?

We see in Genesis that men only thought about evil...

Genesis 6:5 - 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.

God was completely absent from the thoughts of men during the days of Noah.

So, what does this tell us about the times preceding Christ's return?

There will be apostasy, a falling away from the faith with few people who will know Christ as their Lord and Savior. This is consistent with what the Lord said earlier...

Matt 24:12 - And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

This trend is reinforced by the question Jesus asked in Luke 18:8, "*When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*"

How is Genesis 6:13 characteristic of today?

Genesis 6:13 - And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

The time just before the Lord's return will be fraught with violence. As we already discussed, the tribulation will be characterized by whole-sale death with half the world's population dieing by the time the Lord returns. Violence in our world certainly seems to be growing in our world today which is a foreshadowing of what is to come during the tribulation.

How does violence manifest itself in our world today?

- Certainly we have wars occurring somewhere in the world all the time.
- But in the course of daily living, more people have died from car crashes in the U.S. than from all our wars... 50,000 people die from auto accidents every year in the U.S. Road rage has emerged as a common every day occurrence.
- There are even acts of violence that most of us don't even think about: 1.5M unborn babies are aborted every year in the U.S.
- I see personal violence expressed against me when I'm on a bike ride on a straight stretch of road with no cars coming and a good-ole boy usually in a pick-up truck passes me as close as he can without hitting me. Such good-ole boys are making a statement by such an act and demonstrating that their love has grown cold.

How else was Noah's flood like the Day of the Lord?

- God's people (Noah) knew about the coming judgment.
- Noah knew the flood would happen in his lifetime.
- Noah's family was spared judgment and survived.
- Enoch was raptured before the flood.

32. Matthew 24:39 - What does it mean, "took them all away"?

39 "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Those who rejected God died, drowned in the flood from divine judgment.

33. Matthew 24:40-41 - Who will be "taken"?

40 "Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.

41 "Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.

42 "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

The context of the word "took/taken" here appears to say that those taken will be taken in judgment or killed. Certainly it is true that many will be killed so that they will not be able to enter the millennial kingdom...

Matt 25:31-41 - When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory... Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

Only the righteous will be permitted to enter the millennial kingdom...

Rev 19:21 - And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Those who support this interpretation point to the word "then" in Matthew 24:40 which sets this taking of people after the coming of the Son of Man. Thus the taking has to be the judgment and those who remain, remain to enter the Millennial Kingdom. They also cite the parallel passage in Luke 17...

Luke 17:34-37

34 "I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left.

35 "Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left.

36 "Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left."

37 And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?" So He said to them, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

In this case the disciples ask "where" this is to happen and the Lord's answer about the birds gathering to feast on the dead makes it clear that He is talking about the separation of people for judgment at His coming. So this is the most likely interpretation and most common among Bible scholars who don't ignore prophecy.

However, the problem I have with this taken in judgment interpretation is that it describes two people working in the field. At the end of the tribulation, there will not be much working going on in the field...

Rev 8:7 - The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

This doesn't sound to me like there will be much work going on in the field. Even the idea that business will be carried on as usual at the end of the tribulation does not make sense...

Rev 16:18-21 - And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

Note that the earthquake would be so bad that even mountains would crumble. If this is to be taken literally, it is hard to imagine that there would not be any man-made structures left standing. The text goes on about symbolic Babylon which represents the world's system...

Rev 18:17-22 - 'For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship,

sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?' They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.'

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!" Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.

This sounds to me like the end of business as usual: "*no craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.*"

So who is taken away in Matthew 24:40-41?

Many have said this refers to the rapture it certainly gets across the concept of imminence since "*you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.*"

The problem with this being a reference to the rapture however is that in context, Jesus is speaking primarily to the Jews who will be going through the tribulation. While the rapture is no doubt a significant event to the Jews going through the tribulation it occurs before the tribulation and tribulation saints will not be taken in the rapture. So another possibility is that this passage refers to a supernatural lateral rapture regathering the Jews into the land of Israel thus completing the sporadic regathering that has been occurring since May 14, 1948. This supernatural regathering will cause Israel to regard the miracle of their return to the land as a greater miracle than when their forefathers came up out of Egypt...

Jeremiah 16:14-15 – "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that it shall no more be said, 'The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers."

34. Matthew 24:42 - Why should we be watching for the return of the Lord?

42 "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

Because we do not know when He is returning. He could return at any time ...this is the doctrine of "imminence."

35. Matthew 24:43-44 - What is the coming of the Lord compared to? Why?

43 "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.

44 "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The coming of the Lord is compared to the coming of a thief because those who are not ready for Him will be surprised.

How should the imminent return of Christ impact the way we live?

Watch for the Lord and be about our Father's business. The apostle Paul said...

1Thessalonians 5:4-6 - 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.

So we should be sober - not be given to mindless, worldly escapist activities but make good use of the time we have to please God & watch for the Great Escape...

And as Jesus said we should do in the parable of the minas, "*do business till I come*" (Luke 19:13).