



## NG Study Guide: Matthew 24:32-44 “The Kingdom and the Fig Tree” [7.2.17]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. **Leader note:** Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.

### The Study

**Thesis:** After Jesus told His disciples the temple would be completely destroyed (Matthew 24:2), they pressed Him for more details. Jesus responded by describing a number of events and circumstances which He said must occur prior to His return. The information He shared reveals much about when He is coming back, why we can have confidence that what He said will indeed happen, and what we should do while we’re waiting.

#### I. When is Jesus coming back? (vv. 32-35)

Jesus shares a parable to further answer His disciples questions. A parable is simply an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus often taught in parables as a way to reveal spiritual truth to those who “*had ears to hear*,” i.e., those who were truly seeking and willing to listen.

Jesus’ point was just as you can tell when summer is near by observing the budding leaves of the fig tree, so we will know when His return is near when we see “*all these things*” happening. Jesus described “*these things*” in vv. 5-24, and they include false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, increased persecution of Christians, false prophets, lawlessness, the preaching of the gospel to all the nations, the abomination of desolation (when the Antichrist positions himself in the temple as God), and great signs and wonders performed by false Christs and prophets.

Jesus states that when all these things are happening, He is “*near- right at the doors!*” When someone is at the door he is about to enter at any moment!

Jesus also said “*this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*” The most logical understanding of His statement is that all of “*these things*” will be completed during the lifetimes of the people who are alive when they begin.

**Q1: Do you see some of “these things” happening in the world today? Which ones? How does seeing them happening impact you?**

## **II. How can we know for sure “all these things” will happen? (v. 35)**

Jesus then makes a powerful statement: “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away*” (v. 35). Jesus confirms what is revealed elsewhere in the Bible- the world as we now know it will one day be destroyed (c.f., Matt. 5:18, 2 Pet. 3:10). However, the Word of God also reveals there will be a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1, Isaiah 65:17, 2 Pet. 3:13). In contrast to the fact that heaven and earth will pass away, Jesus affirms His words never will. He is guaranteeing everything He said is absolutely true and will come to pass exactly as He described. We can have confidence all these things will occur because Jesus’ words are more sure than the world in which we live!

***Q2: How can knowing all Jesus has said is absolutely true impact your faith, and the way you live?***

## **III. At what exact time will Jesus return? (v. 36)**

Jesus had given His disciples a *general* description of when He would return. Understanding they would probably want more specifics, He continues by addressing the bottom line: “When exactly will You come back?”

Jesus’ response to this implied question is surprising, and perhaps confusing to some. He reveals that no one, except His Father in heaven, knows the exact time of His return, not even Himself (c.f., Mark 13:32). Some have taken this verse to mean Jesus isn’t fully God- after all, shouldn’t God know everything? However, what this really reveals is what theologians call the “hypostatic union”: the combination of divine and human nature. Jesus embodies this hypostatic union: He is fully God (c.f., Philippians 2:5-8), and fully man (c.f., Colossians 2:9), yet He is still one Person.

Could it be that the human nature of Jesus didn’t know when He would return, but the divine nature of Jesus did? No one knows or understands for sure. However, the fact that we cannot understand everything about Jesus shouldn’t cause us to disbelieve Him. If we could understand everything about Him, what kind of God would He be? This was not a denial of Jesus being God, but instead a confirmation that He is also a man.

***Q3: Would you want to know exactly when Jesus is coming back, if you could? How would that knowledge impact who you are and how you’re living today?***

## **IV. What should we be doing while we wait? (vv. 37-44)**

Jesus then compares His coming back to the great flood during the time of Noah. He explains that just as people continued to live their lives as if nothing was going to happen right up until they were destroyed by the flood, so people will also do the same right up to His return. Because we believe Jesus will “rapture” (snatch up) His people (all believers) before the great tribulation begins, we understand vv. 40-41 to refer to this event. Those who have placed their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord will be saved and spend eternity with Him in heaven; those who have rejected Jesus will spend eternity apart from Him.

Jesus’ main point is this: Because we know for sure He is coming back, but we don’t know exactly when, we should be watching and getting ready. To emphasize this, He shares another parable explaining how we would all watch and be ready if we knew someone was coming to rob our home! Therefore, we should be just as prepared for His return.

***Q4: Knowing Jesus has promised to come back again some day, and that no one knows exactly when that will be, what can we be doing to get ready while we wait?***

**Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:**

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

**Ask God to reveal a specific neighbor for you to pray for this week. Write his/her name down somewhere where you will regularly see it, and every time you notice it, pray for that person. Then, watch for opportunities the Lord may open up for you to interact with him/her.**

**Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:**

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

**Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:**

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

**Leader Notes:**

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
2. **Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
3. **Feel free to use an icebreaker question or activity** to get to know one another better.
4. **Every time you meet consider asking:**
  - a. **What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.