

# Why Watch?

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Most of us are familiar with the Olivet prophecy of Matthew 24 and 25. It's been read, studied, and interpreted, for good and for ill, by every generation since it was first penned, and each generation tries to extract a little more information out of it. It's interesting to note a couple of the events that are taking place just prior to Jesus settling into this discourse; let's take particular notice of chapter 23, as we move into what is commonly called the Olivet prophecy. In chapter 23 Jesus denounces the hypocrisy and the blindness of the Scribes and the Pharisees in no uncertain terms. He essentially lays them waste. Verse 31 summarizes it.

**Matthew 23:31** *"Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.*

*32) Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt.*

*33) Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? (NKJV)*

Whoa! I wouldn't want to have been on the wrong end of that observation.

*34) Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city,*

*35) that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.*

*36) Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (NKJV)*

Now notice this, as He concludes that thought, then it's almost as if He turns His attention from the Pharisees and the Scribes to the city of Jerusalem itself.

*37) O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!*

*38) See! Your house is left to you desolate; (NKJV)*

It's like He's anticipating the coming events that will indeed see the temple of God destroyed and the city laid waste, and thousands of people literally slaughtered as these things come to pass.

*39) for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (NKJV)*

I suspect that is way down the prophetic chain of events as well. Then we come to chapter 24.

**Matthew 24:1** *Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple ... (NKJV)*

So they left the temple with this thought: Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets. See, your house is left to you desolate. That's the thought that closes chapter 23. Then they depart from the temple and it's like the disciples are trying to mull over what He could have meant when He made this statement. He says, look at the temple and the buildings and all of it, and the disciples look to Jesus as if to say, You can't mean it, right? Won't these things remain? We know the story; verse 2.

*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." (NKJV)*

Here you see it, but it will end in complete desolation. When the disciples hear this they ask a two-fold question and it's interesting.

*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?" (NKJV)*

When will these things be? We are still asking the same question today, thousands of years later—when will these things be? You can imagine how this statement must have felt or must have affected the disciples. Jesus said all these buildings and such will be torn down, there won't be two stones on top of another. They must have thought, surely that can't happen—You're talking about destroying the temple of God here! This must be about the end of the age, right? When is this going to happen? What are the signs of Your coming? The disciples actually ask Jesus for signs. Then comes a long list of signs—a discourse describing to them what things are going to be like.

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

What we're dealing with, to begin with, are the terrible events that are going to happen. We'll come back to that in just a bit. We look back on this situation and almost 2,000 years have passed now, but He's giving instruction to His disciples and describing signs. They ask Him, what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age, and He goes on to give them signs. What would be the point of giving signs if they aren't going to live to see the end of the age? Of course the disciples are going to live (most of them) to see the destruction of the city and of the temple, so some of this that follows will apply directly to the destruction of Jerusalem back in the first century. But clearly there are descriptions of things then, as well, that had nothing to do with the destruction of the temple originally, so we recognize then that we are looking forward to fulfillment of

prophecies that are still far away. He's going to give signs. Every generation of Christianity, regardless of what color, stripe or flavor—down through the ages—every generation has read this and then done what? Looked for evidence of the fulfillment of scripture, of these prophecies. In some cases wild speculation has been encouraged. So we search the headlines for evidence of fulfilled prophecy. Let's go forward now to verse 32, where Jesus says,

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. (NKJV)*

This happens every year. Maybe it's not a fig tree; in our part of the world it might be an apple tree, or whatever favorite tree you have that you watch, but there is no argument that the signs of spring and summer are obvious and concrete.

33) *So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! (NKJV)*

What if you're one of the disciples? How are you processing this information? How do you process the information today?

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

35) *Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (NKJV)*

He's pointing out to us that there are definite signs, and He just gave a whole series of events that are going to take place, prior to the sign of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven. There will be no mistaking it as these things begin to unfold. Again, down through the years, every generation, regardless of what the orientation might have been, has dealt with these kind of things and tried to figure things out.

I brought along today Paul Johnson's volume, [A History of Christianity](#). Paul Johnson is a British historian and Roman Catholic, as it turns out. This is a pretty good read; he talks about the effect of people studying these events, and looking forward to the Kingdom of God, and all the events that are going to precede it—how it has influenced what's going on around them, all the way back to the beginning. It's interesting (speaking of the last events, etc.), when he writes:

*When Christianity became the state religion of the empire, millenarianism [that is the belief in the millennium and all of the events leading up to it] was frowned upon. Augustine [Augustine died in the fifth century, in 430 A.D.], the ideologist of the official church, presented Revelation [the book of Revelation] in his treatise, [The City of God](#), as a mere spiritual allegory.*

Of course, the book of Revelation offers all kinds of opportunities for speculation, analysis, and predictions. So Augustine, in trying to calm the storm, as it were, simply

dismissed it as allegory—it's there, but don't take it too seriously. He was trying to figure out and make sense of where they were. He's 400 years down the road since Christ was on the earth, died, and was resurrected, so he offered this explanation: The millennium had already begun with Christ and was realized in the shape of the church itself. In other words, Augustine didn't know how else to explain it so his explanation was, don't get into all that Revelation stuff, the millennium began when Christ came and so it's playing out in the church itself—the City of God—and it was a tale of two cities, in effect. Here's the Kingdom of God, here's the kingdom of men, and they're both going along together. That's the way he explained it.

You can look back on it now and realize, that wasn't very accurate, but that's what he tried to do. It didn't have much of an effect because people like to come up with explanations: *Christians continue to believe in the millennium, the coming of anti-Christ, cosmic battles, giant dragons, total upheavals of society*—because they were sorting through those kinds of things and trying to make sense of them—*and endless series of signs that would presage these events.*

When Christianity became the religion of the empire, and talk began of some far-off kingdom coming to earth and taking over everything—overthrowing the status quo—those in charge got a little nervous, thus: *For better or worse, the notion of the apocalypse, that is the book of Revelation, was part of the canon linked to bedrock articles of Christian belief, and it was just too late to suppress them. Moreover* [notice this] *the eschatological* [from the Greek word *eskhatos*, meaning “last things”—we would just say prophecy of the end time] *corpus* [or body of work] *was gradually added to by various sibylline texts, as he calls them.*

The word *sibylline* refers to prophecy and mystery, so in addition to the book of Revelation and other scriptures, various writings began to crop up with other explanations and speculations. We've had our own in our own day. You may recall the Left Behind series, by Tim LaHaye. There was The Late, Great Planet Earth, by Hal Lindsey, and there have been others since then that try to explain political events, by looking at scripture to try to analyze it and present it in a way that explains what's going on, as though we have some kind of inside information. This has been going on for a long time—it's surely not new to our generation.

These sibylline texts, and the popular writers who produced them, had no canonical status, meaning they had nothing to do with scripture, necessarily, but they were popular: *Much used by preachers, writers and theologians.* It wasn't sufficient to just quote the text of the scripture, we'll quote these various books, these sibylline texts, if you will, of prophecy and mystery. Of course if you have the inside scoop on what's going to happen, that's great. *All stress the coming battle between Christ and Anti-Christ.* Now notice this: *The idea could be interpreted to fit almost any political situation.* It didn't matter what generation it was, which century it was. People have the capacity to look at the current political situation and make it fit the prophecies—there it is. It's no different today. You can go to the average Christian bookstore and there are probably shelves of books, relating to the time of the end and all these things that are

supposed to be happening, and how we interpret the current events, etc. So *they identified with kings, emperors, even popes, whether good or bad*. All the signs could be made to fit.

This reminded me of a sermonette I gave in Portland—this goes back a ways, like half a century—it was late 1968 or maybe early 1969, and the sermonette was about the last generation: This generation shall not pass until all these events take place. I had this quote from the Encyclopedia Britannica (they put out an annual update) and it had to do with atomic weapons. It was a statement about the hydrogen bomb, and of course the Americans had the hydrogen bomb and the Russians had the hydrogen bomb—they were stockpiling all these warheads—and the statement was made that it was now possible for mankind to blow himself off the face of the earth. So there we were, at that place.

I suggested (I didn't have the authority to make some kind of a declaration) that we could be in the last generation to see these things come to pass, based on some statement in the Encyclopedia Britannica. It was true that we could have blown ourselves off the earth were we to set loose the furor contained in nuclear weapons and the like. But as it turned out, I look back on that generation and I wasn't yet a father. You think about the last generation, how long is a generation? I wasn't yet a father, and I'm now a grandfather. Linda and I both have grandchildren old enough to put us in the great-grandparent category, in the foreseeable future. It didn't happen in my generation, or at least not that generation. You see, you could take the scripture, the apocalypse, the revelation, and measure them against world events; in those days we were encouraged to take a weekly newsmagazine—U.S. News and World Report was the preferred one (I see Glenn White back there nodding; he remembers)—or a daily newspaper, and part of our project was to look for evidence of fulfilled prophecy; that was just part of the plan. A good diet of sermon delivery would include a prophecy sermon every month or so. That was just part of what we did. I was able to look at the events going on in the world and make sense of them right there in the pages of my daily newspaper.

Dr. Johnson has an interesting comment about the time of the Middle Ages and the fact that it didn't stop with the early years. The same thing went on in the Middle Ages. He notes this: *It was a feature of medieval prophecy that sleeping kings or emperors would awake and either restore harmony or rampage, depending on whether you believe the pope was the vicar of Christ or anti-Christ himself*. Men claiming to be King Arthur, or Charlemagne, or the first Latin emperor of Constantinople, or Emperor Frederick II appeared, raised a following, were hunted down, and then hanged or burned. This was going on constantly.

Notice that disproof by events seems to have done nothing to shake men's belief in prophecy. Various things were prophesied that didn't happen, but it didn't shake their belief in prophecy. Crucial years came and went—now note—1260, 1290, 1335. Daniel 12: 1260 came and surely it will be over in 1260. Daniel said wait until 1290—blessed is he who waits until 1335. All these crucial years came and went. You see

they were trying to make sense out of things. I guess that's a normal thing that a human being would try to do. Nothing happened as foretold but still men believed. Has anything changed in that regard? Nothing took place that was foretold. Still, men believed. We twist ourselves into a pretzel in various ways, to make the numbers make sense, and I thought it would be interesting to take a look at the basic numbers because it can be instructive. You have things like time, times and half a time—1260 days, 42 months, 3-1/2 years and all that sort of thing—the arithmetic of it, let's put it that way.

I did a little survey just for my own, bringing it to remembrance for myself. Let's go briefly to Daniel. The disciples who became the apostles would have had the book of Daniel and they would have been familiar with the prophecies in it (and elsewhere too, of course). In Daniel 2, you have this dream of Nebuchadnezzar and there's this huge image—big statue of a man, huge thing, and remember it was broken down into four basic stages—there was the head of gold, arms and chest of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron, with feet of iron and miry clay. Notice in verses 34 and 35, Daniel is describing the dream to Nebuchadnezzar.

**Daniel 2:34** *You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.*

*35) Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (NKJV)*

Here you have it. Verse 44 of this same chapter says,

*44) And in the days of these kings ... (NKJV)*

So you have the time of the end, and the feet and then the ten toes—you have these ten nations that will be at the time of the end.

*44 continued) ... the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. (NKJV)*

We aren't given a specific timeframe other than *in the days of these kings*—that's as close as we get. So to some that read as an invitation to start looking for the kings. Ten kings—United States of Europe and that sort of thing. It might work out that way, I don't know how it's going to work out exactly. There are other various ways and various options that people bring forth. In chapter 7, again, Daniel is explaining dreams; poor old Nebuchadnezzar, troubled by his dreams, and here you have four wild animals set out. Let's just notice the summary in verses 21 to 28 of Daniel 7.

**Daniel 7:21** *"I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them ... (NKJV)*

That's not good news. Its horn, representing some kind of a government or nation of some kind, is making war against the saints and prevailing against them. Until when?

*22) until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom. (NKJV)*

We're looking forward to this end-time event, if you will, this consummation of the age, when finally the Kingdom of the Most High will prevail.

*23) "Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces. (NKJV)*

One-world government? Here it is. Not perhaps something we would all wish for but it sounds like a pretty good description of one-world government to me—*shall devour the whole earth.*

*24) The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings.*

*25) He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High [again, that reference to persecuting and making war against the saints] and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time. (NKJV)*

How long is that? It doesn't say, it just says *a time and times and half a time*. That's an invitation for people to try to figure out how long it is. Just what does that mean?

*26) 'But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever.*

*27) Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.'*

*28) "This is the end of the account. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed; but I kept the matter in my heart." (NKJV)*

We introduce the prospect of time, times and half a time. So far we don't know what that means. That's an element that is given as an explanation as to when these things will happen or how long it will take for these events to play out. In chapter 12 of Daniel, verse 6 tells us,

**Daniel 12:6** *And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?" (NKJV)*

How long? That's always been the question; we always want to know. How is this going to unfold? We all want to understand. Verse 7.

*7) Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time [here's that statement again; this is how long]; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished. (NKJV)*

This period of a time, times, and half a time is tied in with the shattering of the power of the holy people. That's kind of a sobering description. Verse 8.

*8) Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" (NKJV)*

What's the answer? Verse 9.

*9) And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. (NKJV)*

When is the time of the end coming? Somehow there is this time, times and half a time that will come to fruition then.

*10) Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. (NKJV)*

That's encouraging—at some point in time the wise will understand. Notice verse 11.

*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. (NKJV)*

Okay, another number to put in the mix.

*12) Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. (NKJV)*

This is another little clue as to what is going on and how it will happen.

*13) "But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days." (NKJV)*

So now we have time, times and half a time. We have 1,290 days, we have 1,335 days. I suppose we could speculate that the disciples who were speaking with Jesus from the Mount of Olives would have known and understood those things, or at least known



about them. In Revelation 11, we get to the time of the end, and get a couple more hints as to the timing and the numbers involved. My purpose in going through this is not to explain how all these things work but just to familiarize ourselves with the arithmetic, if you will. Revelation 11, verse 1.

**Revelation 11:1** *Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. (NKJV)*

I assume there is going to be a temple of God and an altar, etc., to be measured.

2) *But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. [Now notice] And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. (NKJV)*

So we bring in a new time element here: forty-two months.

3) *And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." (NKJV)*

Ok, 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth—so here come the two witnesses on the scene. Then in Chapter 12 you have the story of the church being saved from a lot of this and taken to a place of safety.

**Revelation 12:6** *Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. (NKJV)*

Here's this 1,260-day timeframe again. Finally in Chapter 13 you have this beast who comes up out of the sea; it's horrible and terrifying, and in verse 5,

**Revelation 13:5** *... he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. 6) Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. (NKJV)*

The point was, we take a look at how these things are described: forty-two months; 1,260 days; three and a half years; time, times and half a time. Most people hearing this sermon have probably read some kind of article explaining some of these things or at least attempting to, to sort it all out. It's fairly straightforward, isn't it? You have forty-two months, 1,260 days—let's see, if you divide forty-two into 1260, it comes out to thirty days per month; pretty straightforward arithmetic, right? You have 1,260 days, forty-two months, twelve months to the year—that's three and a half years—1,260 days, twelve months, and thirty days per month, so that's 360 divided into 1,260: three and a half years, therefore time, times and half a time must be three and a half years, right? That's basically the way it's explained. So the arithmetic is rather straightforward, it's

not high mathematics. If you can divide by thirty you can come up with a solution. This is all well and good, and these numbers and concepts are put out to help us understand when things come to fruition, but what these numbers do is ignore astronomy.

Think about it—how many days in a month? Not thirty—twenty-nine and a half. How many days in a year? 360? No, a solar calendar, a solar year, is 365 and 1/4 days. Uh-oh, now what? You start putting things together and whose calendar are you going to use to calculate these things, to figure out when all these things are going to come to pass? If you are going to sit down and make a serious effort at figuring it all out, which numbers are you going to use? So you say, if we use the Roman calendar—the solar calendar that we're used to—365 and 1/4 days, that doesn't fit with the twelve months times thirty days. Three and a half years—sorry—three and a half solar years is not 1,260 days, it's a few days more than that.

What's going on here? Which calendar are you going to use? If you use the Hebrew calendar, then, okay, the Hebrew calendar recognizes that there are twenty-nine and a half days in a month. Twenty-nine and a half, twice, is how many?—fifty-nine—so thus the pattern in the Hebrew calendar: thirty days, twenty-nine, thirty, twenty-nine. Twelve months of that and what do you have?—354 days. That doesn't fit the math. After a while, you get really far behind and the calendar doesn't match the seasons. Turns out there's an astronomical cycle of nineteen years and then the Hebrew calendar, seven years in nineteen, add an extra month so that the calendar pretty much stays in tune to the seasons of the year. You add an extra month—thirty days—now what do you have?—384 days—that doesn't fit the math either. So what's going on here? Who was it that inspired the book of Revelation? Is God going to change astronomy before the time plays out? What do you think is going on? Why do we do this?

I think the message is this: The numbers are not for calculating the day and the hour of when these things are going to come to pass. Nobody is going to be able to have some kind of inside information and figure it out based on the arithmetic given in the books of Daniel and Revelation. What it does indicate is that God is in charge and it's going to play out, the consummation of the age will happen, as He plays it out, and He gives you the general figures so you can recognize that He's in charge.

There's no way you can take a look at either set of figures and come up with a logical calculation of how these things are going to happen. You can't figure it out, and yet mankind tries. We've done our own trying, have we not? We've done our best to try to figure it all out—a correspondence course, lessons, articles, booklets written on understanding prophecy and how things are going to pan out. We need to watch out, don't we? This is the whole point: Why watch?

There is only one last generation—only one. That generation is unique and will be unique whether it's in our time or some other time. When you go to the book of Matthew or Revelation and look at these prophecies and you ask yourself, you can look around at the politics and what's happening amongst nations and various political systems around the world, and as Johnson pointed out in his book, you can make it fit—

whatever the political situation is, you can manipulate the situation and make it fit the prophecies as you understand them.

I think obviously our history would tell us that we need to be somewhat careful about how we go about doing these things. These things didn't come to pass in the days of the apostles. They didn't happen in Augustine's day, nor in the Middle Ages, nor in Herbert Armstrong's generation. I have serious doubt it's going to happen in my generation. There's still a lot of things that have to happen, and, as my Canadian friends would probably acknowledge, the question is not which period we are in, it's how far into the third period are we? (Referring to the way hockey is played.) We don't know how long we're going to live. Am I going to be there when it all happens?

Back to the question, why watch? Let's go back to Matthew 24 and notice some things that are common to all generations. There's only one last generation, there can be only one generation that sees the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens, and everyone is going to see it. There can be only one of those. There are some things in Matthew 24 that Jesus points out that are common to all of us—all generations at all times. This is, I think, the thing we need to take heed to. Jesus starts off by talking about the beginning of sorrows, verse 8. What is the beginning of sorrows? The disciples ask Him what will be the sign of Your coming and all that. In verse 4, the latter part, Jesus begins to describe the situation.

**Matthew 24:4** ...*"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.*

7) *For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.*

8) *All these are the beginning of sorrows.* (NKJV)

Now, as to the beginning of sorrows, which, if any of them, do you have control over? Do you have control over wars and rumors of wars? No. Do you have any control over whether there is a famine, or whether there's a pestilence, or whether there is an earthquake? What do you have control over? *Take heed that no one deceives you.* Do you have control over that? I think you do. That's the one thing we do have control over in this matter of the beginning of sorrows. We'll see in a bit that there's a key to avoiding deception. In verse 9, conditions become severe.

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.* (NKJV)

Not looking forward to that. Does that apply to us? I'd like it to apply only to the disciples in the first century and not apply to me. I don't want to be hunted down and under tribulation. The truth of God has never been very well received—the truth. It will be at the time of the end. Verse 10.

10) *And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.* (NKJV)

Well now, do you have control over whether you are offended, or whether you betray another, or whether you hate another? Those are things I think we can say we have control over, if we will. One of the most basic, fundamental lessons I can remember learning, that has stood me in good stead for the most part—you know how it is; here I am learning the lessons all over again—I think was in a sermonette that was given while I was a student at Ambassador College; it had to do with this business of offenses, and the scripture that was quoted was Psalm 119:165: *Great peace have they who love Your law, and nothing will offend them*—nothing will cause them to stumble.

So if you are one who is easily offended, you might ask yourself, maybe there is some part of my character that is lacking and I should be a little more careful about how I conduct myself, if I'm always being offended. Betrayal—what happens when you're faced with threats of one sort or another, such as torture, confiscation of property, imprisonment, and you're asked to betray someone, what are you going to do? Have you figured that out yet? It would be a good idea to make up your mind right now as to how you're going to handle that. Prepare in advance. These are the things we need to be alert to.

10 repeated) *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.* (NKJV)

Notice verse 12.

12) *And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.* (NKJV)

You're in a lawless environment and it gets to the place where it starts to rub off on you—you begin to be worn down, and there comes a day when you say to yourself, I've had enough, forget it. We just grow cold.

13) *But he who endures to the end shall be saved.* (NKJV)

What do you think? Are we going to be spared all these things? Are you going to have to face this kind of situation, where there are clearly things that are offensive? No doubt. People are betraying one another, people are coming to hate one another—you didn't do what I wanted you to do, therefore I hate you—so we have to watch ourselves, what we do and how we do it. Endurance may actually be involved. Verse 29.

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. (NKJV)*

You won't have to worry about whether you calculated it right or whether you used the right metric to determine when these things come to pass. Everybody will know, they will see it: The sign of the Son of Man appearing in heaven.

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. (NKJV)*

We're all going to see it; calculations won't be necessary—you'll know. Then that famous verse we are all familiar with, but we like to set this one aside and go on with our speculations. Verse 36.

36) *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. (NKJV)*

Evidently, as is stated by Jesus Himself, there is certain information that the Father reserves to Himself, and exactly how these things are going to play out or when exactly they play out, He knows. He will make sure that it happens in His way and in His time. We need to keep that in mind. When I was in Portland for a couple years, I worked under Ken Swisher, and he was fond of saying, "Figures don't lie but liars often figure." This is sometimes the way it works, and some are always looking for a way to figure it out. Verse 42.

42) *Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (NKJV)*

That's interesting. Every generation of mankind that has professed Christianity in any way had access to Matthew 24 and has read it. You see all these signs. Isn't it an invitation to look for the evidence in your own generation? How do I apply this to myself? How do you apply it to yourself? Again, verse 42.

42) *Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (NKJV)*

*Watch therefore*—how is it applied and how does it apply? Notice verses 43 and 44.

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. (NKJV)*

All the generations that have preceded us have gone to their graves and the Son of Man has not appeared. But their next waking moment, they will be in the presence of

the Son of Man. Think about your own circumstance. There are three ways that the end can come, as I understand it. One is you happen to be there in the last generation. You see it unfold and you see the whole thing happen: There's the sign of the Son of Man, you rise in the air to meet Him—that's one way, limited to the last generation.

The other way the end can come is you abandon God deliberately, and say, forget it—I don't want anything to do with this; don't bother me, I'm done, and I've had enough. That's not a very good end.

Finally, you simply die. You come to the end of your life, and that is a reality we all face. None of us knows how long we will live or whether we will live through the day or not, whether we will carry on for years, or reach that point where all the medical intervention in the world does not make a difference, and it's just over.

If you die in the faith, what happens? Your next waking moment, you're resurrected as the Kingdom of God is established. What should we be watching for? We all have to face the final moments.

Let's turn to 2 Timothy. In writing to Timothy, Paul gives us a little more insight into the things that we have to be looking for. Prophecy is interesting and Daniel was told that the wise will understand, so I guess we can presume that at some point in time, people will begin to comprehend these things and have a better understanding, but in the meantime, in 2 Timothy, Paul is in prison and this is pretty much the end for Paul; he's not going to live past this, he's going to die—his race is run. Timothy's race hasn't run yet; notice what it says.

**2 Timothy 3:1** *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:*  
(NKJV)

Why do you tell Timothy about the last days? Timothy died how many years ago?—he's gone—centuries, millennia ago. Why tell somebody to be careful about the last times, the last days, if you aren't going to live to see the last days? In one sense we all have our last days, and I suppose, if nothing else, Paul has come to understand that he's not going to live to that time, but Timothy might. Now notice,

2) *For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*  
3) *unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,*  
4) *traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God ...*  
(NKJV)

You don't have to look too far to find evidence of these sorts of things in our culture, in the entertainment that's available for us to consume and so forth. These are the things of course that we want to avoid. Practically every generation has these kinds of things to contend with. There is a devil stirring up these kinds of things all the time. What

should we watch for? We don't want to involve ourselves in this kind of activity. I think what he's saying, at least in part, is to be careful of the company you keep, because this sort of behavior, this sort of world view and approach to life, will rub off on you. A Christian is forever having to go up against this sort of conflict. Send your kids to school and they're exposed to who knows what, so the trial continues. It's a serious situation. Now notice verse 10; Paul says to Timothy,

10) *But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long suffering, love, perseverance,*

11) *persecutions, afflictions [and so forth]. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. (NKJV)*

It's a contrast to the things that the world tends to fall into, influenced by the prince of the power of the air. Paul has done his best to set an example, totally contrary to the world's approach; he's pointing this out to Timothy and this is the kind of example we all need to set. We're going to be faced with that. Paul says, out of them all the Lord delivered me. Verse 12.

12) *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (NKJV)*

So the next time you're persecuted, recognize that God didn't say it would be without a measure of discomfort on our part. Now notice verse 13.

13) *But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. (NKJV)*

In the world at large, as the culture that dominates the world descends into the pit of immorality, so to speak, it's easy to stay only a step or two ahead of what's going on around us. We can think, well, at least I'm better than what's going on in our world, or, yes, I have my problems but I'm not as bad as that person over there. You have to be careful with that approach because as the world descends into the pit, you could descend right along with it, all the way down, claiming to be a step or two ahead of the world: I'm a little bit better than the rest of the world, so that must be good enough. No, you have to bear in mind who you compare yourself to.

Do you compare yourself to the status quo that's in the world? What did Jesus say? Become you perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. That is a very high standard—I don't see God compromising with that. (Thankfully He is patient with us.) So there are these two extremes. What should we be watching for? When I look at my own personal life, does it align with the example, the perfection that is our God and Father, or is it more in tune with what's going on in the world? Watch, look in the mirror, what do you see? These are the things of which we should certainly be watchful. Verse 14.

14) *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,*

15) *and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.* (NKJV)

Here brethren, is the key to avoiding deception: It is to be familiar with scripture. Somebody may try to twist it a little bit to lead you astray—a deception of some sort or another, pursuing a course that is not in harmony with God's way—and you will know it because you're familiar with the scriptures. That's where we look. It's interesting, what holy scriptures did Timothy have? It's commonly called the Old Testament, *to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ.*

Once again, the numbers are interesting—we get all excited about numbers and their fulfillment, and we look for this set of events and this confluence of nations, and political this, that, and the other thing, and we are constantly looking for evidence that the time of the end has come.

We need to be looking in the mirror and asking for God's guidance to make sure that we are aligned with His expectations, regardless of how the prophecies work out. That's not to say that prophecy isn't important, but on the other hand, because there are specific elements of prophecy that we need to understand, maybe we won't understand all the details until it's all over, until we get down to the very end. I don't know when my days are up, how many days I have left, and neither do you. But I think it's important for us, in spite of how the numbers and the arithmetic eventually work out, that we not be involved or excited so much about times and seasons but rather maintain the high standards that God expects of us. Let's be aware of that, brethren.

We need to watch, we need to be aware, but let's be aware first and foremost of our relationship to God and to Jesus Christ, to make sure that's harmonious and proper. Then we will understand the prophetic things when the time is right. Let's keep our focus in the right place, seek God's guidance through everything that we do, and then we'll see, we'll sort it out, and God will lead us where He wants us to be.