

We’ve been working our way through Matthew for a while now – for over a year, and even though it’s been a fair while, we’ve actually been pressing on pretty quick... That is until we got to chapter 24 anyway.... We’re now into our **third** week of studying this single chapter – And there’s a lot in it.

The first week, we looked at how the end of the world’s history, relates to the world disasters that we see today. And these are the **beginning** of the end, but **not** the end. They are like **birth** pains – the groanings of the world, are **like** the end, but it’s **not** the end. And so we are reminded to get ready; and stay ready.

Then last week, we got to “*What to expect when you’re expecting.*” - We’re expecting Jesus to return, so what do we expect in the lead up to His return? And we didn’t get very far – we only got 2 points out (well we’re only going to get 1 point out today, and there’s more to come). So, what do we expect?:

1. Firstly, we expect Jesus to be a long time coming. Some people think, “It’s been 2000 years – there’s your proof – He’s not coming...”

Jesus can come any day – any moment of any day – And the fact that it’s been 2000 years, should **not** discourage us from being watchful. Jesus said, that He would be a long time coming, And in a few weeks time, we’ll read a couple of parables, telling

us exactly that.

2. And the second thing we learned last week, is to expect big trouble. Before Jesus returns, there will be severe persecution. There will be world-wide upheaval. There will be, what Jesus called, “The Great Tribulation” – now that just means “The Big Trouble”.

And I spent quite some time explaining this one, because many people today, are caught up in the modern (feel-good) idea, of what’s called the pre-tribulation rapture (that’s a big word that simply means they believe Christians are going to be snatched out of the world, **before** the big trouble begins). ... And that’s a very tempting belief, because that’d make it a whole lot easier on us, but that belief, does **not** stack up, with what the Bible teaches us. The Bible very clearly says, that Christians will be **in** the world **during** the big trouble, and so we need to be ready for it.

So, that was the last two weeks (in a nutshell) – And today, we’re going to go on with “What to expect when you’re expecting....”

3. And the third thing we need to expect, before the return of Jesus, is:

(Cartoon)

a proliferation of false prophets and false christs.

V4: **See that no one leads you astray**

V5: **For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Christ," and they will lead many astray.**

V11 **And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray**

V23 **Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴**

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

.....

Every now and then, some charismatic personality, elevates himself as a guru or a messiah, or a leader of a cult. And all sorts of people from all sorts of walks of life, become their followers... Some of them have ended in disaster.

Here’s a couple that I remember happening, in my life time.

Vernon Wayne Howell; (you probably haven’t heard of him) born: August 17, 1959, was the American leader of

the Branch Davidians religious sect, And he believed himself to be its final prophet.

(you might’ve heard of this fellow) Howell legally changed his name to David Koresh (Koresh being the Persian name of Cyrus the Great. In 1993, the US ATF (alcohol; tobacco; & Firearms Bureau), raided the cult’s ranch at Waco, Texas, and thus the Waco Texas siege began.... When they finally went in, they found David koresh, another 54 adults, and 28 children, dead and burned....ⁱ

***Shoko Asahara** (Born 1955–), founded the Japanese religious group Aum Shinrikyo in 1984. He declared himself Christ, Japan's only fully enlightened master and the Lamb of God. His mission was to take upon himself the sins of the world. He outlined a doomsday prophecy, which included a Third World War, and described a final conflict culminating in a nuclear Armageddon, Humanity would end, **except** for the elite few who joined his religious group. The group gained international notoriety in 1995, when it carried out the Sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway. 13 people died, and many others were severely injured. Asahara has been sentenced to death, and is awaiting execution.ⁱⁱ*

*And then of course, some of you might remember “**the Moonies**” (no, not Peter & Pam). Their leader claimed*

to be the messiah, and he became famous for mass weddings. He married up to 30000 couples at a time (brides and grooms who had never met each other, by the way)....

So, every now and then, you hear of one of these crazies... and I find myself wondering, “What would possess anyone to follow these guys in the first place?” But people fall for it.

And so when **we** think of false christs and false prophets, it’s easy to think of those sorts of people... and assume it’s only the extremely gullible who follow them...

But there are some other, pretty big organisations, who seem to have been given more credibility – probably because they haven’t had the scrutiny they deserve.

Down the end of Robert Street, in this little town of St George, you’ll find the Jehovah Witnesses Kingdom Hall. Head office for the Jehovah Witnesses, is called the “Watchtower” organisation, and it reports a worldwide membership of 7.9 Million people. And we’ve all had the JW’s come knocking on our doors, to tell us that what we believe is wrong, and they’re right, and they seem like very lovely and very reasonable

people, but the problem is... they’ve been misled.... But many of us don’t actually know what they believe (and sadly, many of us don’t even know what **we** believe).

In 1878, The Watchtower Organisation, claimed that 1914 would be *the "end" of the system of things, the conclusion of Armageddon and the start of the earthly paradiseⁱⁱⁱ*. - They taught that in 1878, Jesus began invisibly ruling the world.^{iv}, and that it’d all be wrapped up, done-and-dusted in 1914, therefore the resurrection of the saints would have to happen **before** 1914^v...

That obviously didn’t happen. They’ve since changed their minds, and in 1915 they revised their “Studies in Scriptures” books. They now believe that 1914 is when Jesus began to rule, in heaven.

In 1918, their new president prophesied that the resurrection of the saints would begin on earth, in 1925...

And it goes on and on and on. If you care to do any research on the Jehovah Witnesses, you will find failed prophecy after failed prophecy after failed prophecy, ... and yet they have millions of followers.... They don’t believe that Jesus is God. They prophesied dates when Jesus would come back (several times now) and He hasn’t. ... What can we say? These are false prophets. And Jesus warned us that they would come....

Here’s another big one:

In 1830, Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints, or what we know as the Mormons. They base their teachings on the Book of Mormon,

According to Smith's account and the book itself, the Book of Mormon was originally written in otherwise unknown characters referred to as "reformed Egyptian" engraved on golden plates. Smith said that the last prophet to contribute to the book, a man named Moroni, buried it in a hill in present-day New York and then returned to earth in 1827 as an angel, revealing the location of the book to Smith and instructing him to translate it as evidence of the restoration of Christ's true church in the latter days^{vi}.

And people believe this stuff.

According to the Mormons, they have over 83,000 missionaries worldwide and a membership of over 15 million people^{vii}.

Now, in 1835, Joseph Smith predicted that within 56 years (1891), Jesus would return. Of course He didn’t.... And he had many other failed prophecies as well.

It’s not only the crazies who fall for it – millions of people follow this lot... And Jesus told us to expect false Christs and false prophets. Well, here they are...

Even within the established Christian church – we don’t get too many false Christs – but we do get false prophets....

What do they teach? Jesus said that they would teach that either **they** were the Christ, or that Jesus would return in a secret way, and those who didn’t follow **them**, would miss out on seeing Christ...

And Jesus said, it’s **not** going to be like that. ²⁶ **So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.** ²⁷ **For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.**

When Jesus actually comes, there’s not going to be anything secret about it... If you’ve got eyes in your head to see with, you’ll see it happening – as easy as you can see lightening, right over the horizon, or as easy as you can see vultures, way up in the sky, circling around road kill... – no matter where you are in the world, you’ll see it....

And even if you’re blind, you’re not going to miss it – it’s going to be noisy.

Verse 31 **And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.**

When that day comes, you don’t have to go looking for Jesus – He’ll find you...

And it’s going to be loud – it’s going to be loud enough to wake the dead, and it will.

So Jesus said “Expect false christs”. “Expect false prophets”... But what do they do? What is their aim? ... Well, their aim is actually quite sinister: To lead Christians astray. That should give you a pretty good hint as to where they come from, hey? Who wants to lead Christians astray? Satan.

You have been saved from the ‘Kingdom of Darkness’ into the ‘Kingdom of Light’, and Satan hates that, and he wants you back. And that’s why false Christs and false prophets will arise. Some will even have miraculous powers – they’re going to have a few tricks up their sleeve, to try and get you away from following Jesus Christ, to start you following a lie, or to just fall away altogether.

So, how can we make sure that we are not deceived?

Well, that’s what we’re doing here today: We’re learning “What to expect when we’re expecting”. If you know your Bible – if you know what your **Bible** says about the return of Christ, you will not get misled.

- You **know** that false christs are going to come. You know false prophets are going to come, so you’re going to be on the watch-out for them
- Jesus will **not** come back secretly – you **know** that, so you won’t fall for it.
- Jesus said “**No one** knows the time of my return”... You **know** He said that. So you’re not going to fall for it, when someone puts a date on it.
- When the **big** trouble comes, and Christians are persecuted and killed, you’re not going to lose heart – you’re not going to be convinced there’s some **easier** path... Because Jesus said, to expect the trouble, and to stand strong through it. (to endure)
- Even if someone appears, who performs great signs and wonders – You won’t be misled, will you? No matter how wonderful they are, you check out their teaching – “Is that what the Bible says?”, or are they twisting the Scriptures, to say what **they** want?

The only way to guard against false teaching; false prophets; false christs: is to fill up on the good stuff. Get into your Bible. Get into a Bible study group.

Don’t even take the preacher’s word for it – When you go home after church, get into your Bible and check it out for yourself.

Well, there’s a few more things yet, for us to expect when we’re expecting, but I think I’ll have to leave that for another week.

Let’s pray:

Lord, we want to thank you, that you’ve told us what to expect when we’re expecting.

You haven’t told us everything, but you’ve told us all you want us to know.

Lord, we thank you, that you have not left us alone.

We thank you that, while we wait for you, You are with us.

We thank you that, while we endure the big trouble, your Spirit is in us, giving us strength.

We thank you, that even today, as false christs and false prophets arise,

Your Spirit is with us.

Lord, give us discernment.

Help us to not be misled by these people.

Lord, we thank you for your truth.

We thank you for your Scriptures, that outline the path of life.

We thank you for Godly teachers and Godly prophets,
Who faithfully teach Your word,
Without trying to fill up the gaps with man-made
thoughts or with Satan’s deception.

Lord thank You that as we wait for you,
We can trust that Your good and perfect plan and
timing, are all in hand.

Come Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Koresh

ⁱⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_people_claimed_to_be_Jesus

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/failed-1914-predictions.php>

^{iv} "Our Lord, the appointed King, is now present since October 1874, A.D., according to the testimony of the prophets, to those who have ears to hear it: and the formal inauguration of his kingly office dates from Apr 1878, A.D." *Studies in Scriptures Series IV* (1897) p.621

^v *Studies In the Scriptures - Thy Kingdom Come* 1908 Ed. "That the deliverance of the saints **must take place some time before 1914** is manifest, since the deliverance of fleshly Israel, as we shall see, is appointed to take place at that time, and the angry nations will then be authoritatively commanded to be still, and will be made to recognize the power of Jehovah's Anointed. Just how long before 1914 the last living members of the body of Christ will be glorified, we are not directly informed; but it certainly will not be until their work in the flesh is done; nor can we reasonably presume that they will long remain after that work is accomplished. With these two thought in mind, we can approximate the time of the deliverance."

^{vi} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Mormon

^{vii} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormon_church