

REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS



Signs of Jesus' return based on the seven seals and Matthew 24.

So, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, *right* at the door.
Matthew 24:33

Preface

Because end time biblical prophecy is such a widely interpreted subject, there are going to be numerous, often conflicting, scenarios describing how things are expected to play out. This booklet is an attempt to sort through all of the conjecture and present a view that is based directly on scripture.

What I consider to be the basis or framework of all prophecy concerning the return of Jesus is the scroll with seven seals. Jesus gives a parallel account of these seals in Matthew 24 and there are other scriptures that provide additional details as well. Looking at all of these sources together forms the basis for what can reasonably be expected to happen in those days. There will certainly be more than what's covered here as this is only meant to serve as a foundation.

Those who engage in the study of end time prophecy have an idea of how they expect things to unfold. Given the complexity of the subject, it's likely that their current viewpoint is different from the one they started with and will continue to evolve provided they can avoid becoming dogmatic about it. We should be flexible and willing to give honest consideration to other **scriptural** viewpoints. While we may not agree with them, there's no harm in understanding them. They might just help bring the picture into focus at some future point. There's certainly no merit in dismissing them.

The first section will cover the prophetic framework of the seven seals together with the corroboration of what Jesus taught in Matthew 24. The next section will cover other prophetic passages that provide additional detail and how they are incorporated into that framework followed by the last section which contains some commonly held expectations that are more speculative than scriptural.

The Prophetic Framework

On multiple occasions Jesus stated that He was going to go away but that He would come again. Before He left, He instructed His disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. The book of Acts is an account of some of the efforts of the apostles who were doing just that. Jesus said that when the gospel had been preached to all the nations then the end would come.

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14

This is the first, most general statement we have concerning the timing of the return of Christ. His return, and the subsequent end of Satan's kingdom, will not happen until the gospel has been preached in the whole world. We see this same sequence in Revelation when Jesus tells John to write the things **which are**, meaning the spreading of the gospel, and the things which will come afterward: the end of Satan's rule.

Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. Revelation 1:19

John then wrote a description of his vision of Jesus followed by seven letters to seven churches and then he describes the events of the seven seals which bring about the end. These two verses speak of the same thing.

- Matthew 24:14 - The gospel being preached worldwide, then comes the end.
- Revelation 1:19 - The seven churches take place, then comes the end.

From this we can determine that the seven seals provide a framework for all prophecy concerning the return of Jesus. They occur after the gospel has been preached worldwide and bring about the end of Satan's reign. The correlation between the signs that Jesus gave us in Matthew 24 and the events of the seven seals confirms this to be the case.

The Seven Seals & Matthew 24

In Matthew 24 Jesus answers the question of what the sign of His return will be. He gives a description of what will take place in those days just prior and says that when we see all those things happening that we should discern His near return. What He describes can also be seen in the opening of the seven seals. These two sections of scripture taken together form a solid framework of what can reasonably be expected to take place after the gospel has been preached in the whole world. The things that take place, and the order in which they do, are generalized as follows:

1. Covert conquering - preparing for the revealing of the false prophet.
2. A time of war - the false prophet is revealed and takes center stage.
3. Believers are martyred - the false prophet makes war against the saints.
4. God's wrath - Wrath is poured out on the false prophet's kingdom.
5. The return of Christ - Satan's rule ends and Christ's begins.

All prophecy concerning the return of Jesus will fit somewhere in that sequence of events.

Covert Conquering

The opening of the first seal corresponds to the release of the beast from the abyss, an event that's mentioned in Revelation 17. The beast is an evil angel who is pictured in Daniel 7 as the beast with ten horns, and in Revelation 13 as the beast with seven heads and ten horns. He will oversee a world government like the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece did per Daniel 10.

Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. Revelation 6:1-2

Peace is not removed from the earth until the second seal is opened so the "conquering" being referred to here does not involve armed conflict. It is covert in nature with the ultimate purpose being to enthrone the man of sin as the ruler of the world. The beast does this by manipulating the global powers into reshaping the political landscape, and by centralizing the control of the world's economies. While these things are taking place, he is conditioning people mentally through the spreading of lies and deception.

The political and economic aspects of his conquering will be discussed later as additional details since they aren't covered in Matthew 24. Jesus chose rather to emphasize the deceitfulness that would accompany the beast so that believers could be on guard against it.

The lies and deception that precede His return tend to get glossed over for whatever reason but it gets significant mention in scripture which is a good indication that it warrants a fair amount of consideration. When Jesus was asked about the sign of His return, His initial response was a warning against being misled.

And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you."
Matthew 24:4

The deception will come about by various ways and means and will always seek to promote ungodliness by undermining the truth of the gospel of the kingdom of God. Jesus warns that this deception will also infiltrate the church.

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.
Matthew 24:5 KJV

This verse is speaking about those who come in Jesus' name and proclaim that He is the Christ. They identify as believers, however, they are either unable or unwilling to discern truth from error and consequently mislead many. This can be seen in some churches today where sinful behavior has become accepted as normal. They have accepted the doctrine of demons because it appeals to them and they give preference to their own desires over God's truth.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. 1 Timothy 4:1

All believers need to make certain for themselves that what they are being taught is truth as defined by God in His word. Any teaching that is contrary to scripture should be rejected regardless of who says it or the rationale used to justify it because it is a doctrine of demons. The prevalence of false doctrine will reveal who has spent time acting on the words of Jesus and who has ignored them. Only those who practice truth will have the spiritual discernment to see through the lies.

Eventually, the deception will encompass more than false doctrine alone. False prophets will appear and perform supernatural signs and wonders in an effort to validate their lies.

For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. Matthew 24:24-25

This type of activity takes deception to a whole different level. These false Christs and false prophets will be channels through which supernatural activity is manifested. They will likely be skilled in the secret arts as Pharaoh's sorcerers and magicians were back during the time of the plagues in Exodus 7 & 8. We don't know exactly how all they will manipulate the natural realm but the great majority of the world will be deceived by what they do. We do know from Revelation 13 that the ultimate false prophet, the man of sin, is able to make fire come down from heaven to earth.

There is a reason that Jesus has told us ahead of time that deception will be prevalent in the days leading up to His return. It is the most often mentioned sign that will accompany those days and is something that should be expected and prepared for.

The conquering by the evil angel beast when the first seal is opened is done with a specific purpose in mind. It is all for the purpose of setting the stage for the rise of the false prophet. This is accomplished through a time of war.

A Time of War

After the beast has made the necessary preparations, the second seal is opened. This begins a time of war which will engulf a large part of the world.

When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that *men* would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him. Revelation 6:3-4

You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for *those things* must take place, but *that* is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs. Matthew 24:6-8

It will be a time of war on the scale of a world war and many will believe it to be the end, but Jesus says that this war is just the beginning. He also mentions famine which is related to the opening of the third seal.

When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard *something* like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine." Revelation 6:5-6

The food shortage which leads to rationing as described in the third seal is most likely the result of supply lines to population centers being disrupted due to the global conflict. It seems that common people are primarily affected since luxury items, the oil and the wine, are left alone. Eventually, the food shortage does lead to famine as Jesus mentioned and as is also mentioned in the fourth seal.

When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth. Revelation 6:7-8

The fourth seal shows the consequences of nation rising against nation. It will be a time of global chaos that is perceived as the end of the world but there is a boundary

set that limits its extent, one fourth of the earth. When the fourth seal has run its course, the time of war will be over. This time of war provides the opportunity for the false prophet to transition from being a lesser leader to becoming the undisputed ruler of the world. This transition will be covered in more detail in a later section.

Through the signs and wonders that he performs, he deceives everyone into believing that he is God; well, almost everyone. The elect will see through his ruse and are not taken in by his lies and deception. As ruler of the world, he sets out to carry on the conquering that the beast began when the first seal was opened by waging war against the saints.

Believers Are Martyred

The false prophet capitalizes on the global sentiment of the deceived, who consider him to be God, and enacts a law that calls for the death of anyone who refuses to worship him as God. This is how he identifies and wages war against the saints knowing that they will never worship him. This will lead to a time of martyrdom as described by the fifth seal.

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. Revelation 6:9-11

Jesus also speaks of this time of great tribulation in Matthew 24.

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name." Matthew 24:9

The false prophet is given the authority to wage war against the saints for forty-two months. At first, his "worship or die" ultimatum is prosecuted with great intensity and a large number of believers choose to die rather than worship a false god. This is a time of great tribulation for believers and continues until the sixth seal is opened.

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Matthew 24:29-30a

I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"
Revelation 6:12-17

When the sixth seal is opened the time of great tribulation is over. Something happens during the sixth seal that inhibits the war effort against the saints. The false prophet, and those who are deceived by him, are no longer uninhibited in their persecution efforts. Also, the time of God's wrath begins so they will be coping with the adverse effects thereof for the duration of the forty-two months.

God's Wrath

The seventh seal contains God's corrective discipline and His wrath. When it is opened, there are seven plague angels who sound a series of trumpets which cause particular aspects of God's discipline and wrath to begin. The purpose of the seven plagues is to convince the deceived people that the false prophet is not God and to call them to repent of their idolatry. The seventh seal isn't described in Matthew 24 probably because His wrath is not a sign for the faithful to observe.

The Return of Christ

At the last plague, the seventh trumpet, Jesus returns and the ultimate regime change takes place. Satan is thrown into the abyss and his angels are vanquished along with the ungodly followers of the false prophet. The kingdom of God is established on earth with Jesus ruling the nations.

Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." Revelation 11:15

And they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. Matthew 24:30b

Summary

The seven seals form the framework for the end times. Jesus begins opening them after the gospel has been preached in all the world and when the last one has run its course, He returns to rule the nations. All prophecy concerning the return of Jesus will take place during one of the seven seals.

- First Seal - The beast is released from the abyss and sets the stage for the rise of the false prophet through covert conquering.
- Second Seal - A time of war begins.
- Third Seal - Food rationing
- Fourth Seal - The rise of the false prophet and the end of the wars.
- Fifth Seal - A time of great tribulation when believers are martyred by the false prophet and his followers.
- Sixth Seal - The great tribulation ends and the wrath of God begins.
- Seventh Seal - The seven plagues of God's discipline and wrath are carried out culminating in the return of Christ which spells the end of Satan's reign.

Other Prophecies

Using the seven seals as a framework we can look at other prophecies to get some additional details about what can be expected and when. The ones listed below are but a small sample but they tie in very closely with the seals.

Final World Government

There are two prophecies in Daniel that describe a final world kingdom. The first one is in chapter two and describes the final kingdom that is spawned when the evil angel beast is released from the abyss. It is pictured as the feet of iron and clay of the great statue which is described as a multinational, multicultural form of government. The beast uses this form of government to bring about changes that will facilitate the rise of the false prophet and is an aspect of the conquering of the first seal.

The first seal has already been opened as evidenced by the existence of that final world kingdom described in Daniel 2, the United Nations. We don't know exactly when it was opened but several prophetically significant events and trends seem to have their origin sometime around 1900.

The U.N. established the state of Israel by resolution leading to the Israelis being gathered back to their homeland which is also prophetically significant. The evil angel beast uses the U.N. to deceive nations and promote a global agenda through initiatives that serve to erode nationalism and bring about a one-world, one-people, neo-Babel type of existence. This agenda is being pursued for the express purpose of facilitating the false prophet's rise to power.

The second prophecy describing a final world kingdom in Daniel is in chapter seven and pictures the beast as having ten horns. It describes the transition from the multinational world government we see today to the world dictatorship led by the false prophet.

After the beast has made the necessary preparations, ten horns or leaders rise to power which is followed by the rise of the false prophet. The false prophet gains prominence and becomes the world leader as a result of destroying three of the ten horns.

A Time of War

There are only two places in the seven seals that speak of a time of armed conflict. The first is the second seal when peace is removed from the earth and the second is after the sixth plague when the armies of the world are gathering for Armageddon. So

when Jesus talks about wars and rumors of war that are the beginning of birth pangs, He is referencing the time of war associated with the second seal, a time of war which includes the rising of the ten leaders followed by the false prophet's destruction of three of them. There's simply no other place within the framework of the seals for that to happen. And since the first seal has already been opened, the time of war associated with the second seal is the next significant prophetic event to take place.

We get some additional details about the ten leaders and how the first seal transitions into the second seal from Revelation 17. The ten leaders are not leaders of nations but leaders of something else. They are in power briefly, for only one hour, during which time they destroy the world's capital. It's unlikely that the ten leaders planned to rule for only one hour but rather that they were being used as a means to an end and that their authority was quickly usurped by the false prophet. When we look at Revelation 13, we can also see that there is an economic aspect to all of this which helps to explain things.

A Global Economy

As part of the push toward globalism, there has been an intertwining of the world's economies. This has helped to promote a shift away from tangible currencies toward electronic funds which are more easily exchanged, however, they are also more centrally controlled. All of this is for a specific purpose.

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and *he provides* that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name. Revelation 13:16-17

This passage shows that the world's economies become so centralized that one person can dictate who has access to the commerce system and who doesn't. It's not difficult to see how this could happen since money has been transitioning toward becoming a number stored in a datacenter somewhere for some time now. People only have control over their electronic funds as long as they have access to them. That could change in an instant.

It's highly likely that the ten leaders work to set up some kind of electronic economy that they govern. After bank accounts and other electric assets are incorporated into their system, they have control over it all and can do with it as they please. It would explain how ten leaders, who are not leaders of nations, can reign as kings, and it would also explain how their authority could be so quickly usurped by one person.

Summary

These other prophecies provide some additional details of what we can expect to take place as the seals are being opened. As a part of the second seal being opened, the world's capital is destroyed by ten leaders. They attempt to bring in their new world order and exercise their rule through the control of the economies of the world. Their reign lasts for only one hour because the false prophet hijacks their economic system for his own purposes. Three of the ten leaders decide to take matters in their own hands and attack the false prophet with an overwhelming military force. Alliances crumble as nation rises against nation and kingdom against kingdom. The world plunges into chaos and many think that the end of the world has come, but the end is not yet. On the contrary, it is only the beginning of birth pangs.

Using supernatural power, the false prophet destroys the forces that were sent against him by calling fire down from heaven. This makes him appear invincible and no one dares challenge his authority. He causes the wars to cease and people are amazed at the signs and wonders he performs. He is hailed as a savior by the people of the world and seizes the moment by declaring himself to be God.

After this comes a time of martyrdom when the false prophet wages war against the saints for forty-two months. He does this by enacting a law that requires everyone to worship him. Those who won't are to be put to death. He uses the economic system that he usurped from the ten leaders to expedite and enforce that mandate.

He requires everyone to receive his mark on their right hand or their forehead in order to be able to buy or sell anything. His mark will be used to identify who is a part of his kingdom and worships him, and who does not. Those who will not go along with his lies are to be killed.

Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. Revelation 14:12

Unlikely Expectations

There are a lot of conflicting interpretations out there that describe how things are going to take place before Jesus returns. It's up to each individual to test them and give precedence to what is directly supported by scripture when assessing whether something is a reasonable expectation or not. The following is a list of commonly held views that should not be considered as signs for people to look for since they lack a **solid** biblical basis.

The Beast is the Antichrist

Many people believe that the beast with seven heads and ten horns in Revelation 13:1 is a human, the man of sin or the Antichrist, and that the false prophet is his religious leader. We are told in Revelation 17 that this beast comes up out of the abyss which is a place that is only ever used in connection with evil spirit beings, not humans. The beast with seven heads and ten horns is an evil angel much like the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece who are mentioned in Daniel 10.

Out of the evil trio of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (Rev 16:13, 20:10) only the false prophet is a human. The dragon and the beast are evil angels. When people refer to the Antichrist or the man of sin or the son of perdition, those are references to the false prophet. The beast with seven heads and ten horns can not be a human because of his connection with the abyss.

10 Nation Federation

There is an expectation among some that there will be a ten nation federation that rises out of Europe to form a "revived Roman Empire". This idea was very prevalent as the EU was forming but has since waned or morphed into some variation thereof. The notion comes from prophecies concerning the ten horns of the beast.

This view arises primarily from failing to distinguish between references to the spiritual and references to the natural. Consequently, a key verse in Revelation 17 is ignored or twisted. Revelation 17:12 says that these ten horns, or leaders, have not received a kingdom but receive authority as kings for one hour. Some will argue that "one hour" simply means a short period of time. How long does 1260 days last? A long period of time or 1260 days? When a number precedes a time reference such as hour, day, or year, it is a specific reference to a duration of time. When preceded by an article such as a, an, or the, it is a general reference.

The ten leaders are only in power for **one** hour as is stated in Revelation 17. They aren't leaders of nations. They are part of the covert conquering of the first seal and all

indications are that they are involved in creating a global economy that they can and do control, for one hour.

Seven Year Peace Treaty

This idea comes from Daniel 9:27 and is used by some to form a time frame for end time events. There are many variations of this theme and it is quite a complicated subject. Suffice it to say that there is no other scripture that corroborates a future seven year period of time. For that reason, it should not be considered a credible sign. No doctrine should ever be based on only one verse.

The prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 is given as a time frame to accomplish certain things such as, "to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, **to make atonement for iniquity**" among others. Atonement for iniquity was clearly accomplished through the new covenant of Christ's shed blood on the cross. During His time of ministry, He confirmed the new covenant with the Jews.

It only makes sense that the covenant being referred to in Daniel 9:27 is the new covenant, which is entirely germane to that prophecy, instead of some peace treaty which is not. While the new covenant may not have been confirmed for the full seven years during Jesus' ministry on earth, there will still be three and one-half years where the Jews are being protected in the wilderness. During that time, God sends His two witnesses to prophesy and very possibly to complete confirming the covenant with them. Another possibility is that the apostles continued confirming the covenant with the Jews for three and one-half years after Jesus' ascension before the gospel was taken to the gentiles.

Rebuilding the Temple

Another common perception is that the temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt and the sacrificial system of worship must be reinstated before the false prophet is revealed. This is based largely on 2 Thessalonians 2:4 where the man of sin shows himself to be God in the temple of God. The temple being described in that verse could just as easily be a temporary tabernacle as it could be a permanent structure. The term "temple" is more of a reference to where God dwells than it is to the type of structure.

People should realize that the rebuilding of a Solomon-like temple on the temple mount in Jerusalem isn't necessary for the man of sin to be revealed. It might happen but it just as easily might not. Based on Daniel 11:45 I'm inclined to think not.

Escaping Tribulation

Some people believe that they will not be affected by the coming time of tribulation described by the seven seals and reiterated by Jesus. They are expecting Him to

appear in the clouds and take them away before difficult times begin. This expectation stems more from wishful thinking than it does from scripture.

The scriptures teach that tribulation, or persecution for our faith, is something that we should expect. Jesus makes this clear in John 15:20 when He states that we are not greater than He, and that if He was persecuted then we should expect the same. And again 2 Timothy 3:12 states that all those who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Expecting to escape the coming time of trouble is a false hope that tends to lead to complacency and unpreparedness. This is the opposite of what Jesus taught when He said to be on the alert and to be ready for His return. The teaching of a pre-tribulation escape is not only fundamentally unscriptural but runs contrary to the exhortations of Jesus.

This subject is handled more extensively at www.thelastdaze.com in the Booklets section under Expectations.