

# LIFE FAITH FUSION DEVOTIONAL

## Be Ready

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#### SCRIPTURE STUDY

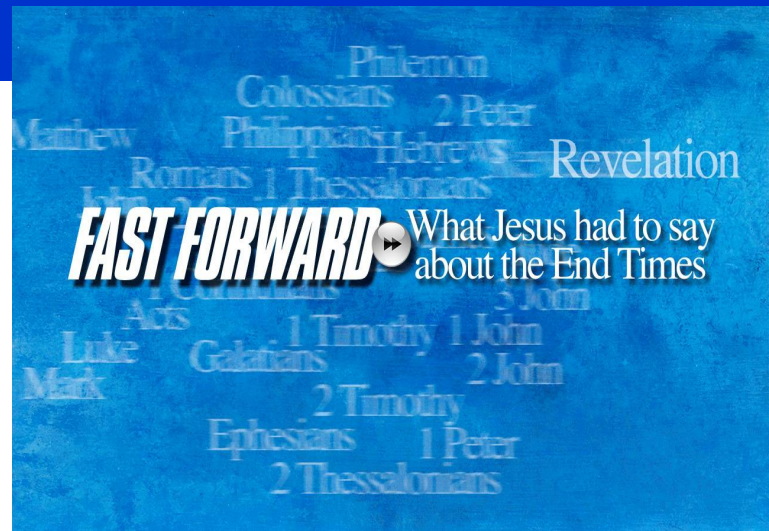
Matthew 23-25  
 Genesis 3:1-14  
 I Thessalonians 5:1-11  
 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4  
 Romans 8:9  
 Ephesians 1:13-14  
 1 John 1:5-7; 2:28; 4:18  
 John 10:27-30

#### DIGGING DEEPER

Deceit, war, famine, apostasy, persecution, and world-wide evangelization are six signs that Christ mentions in His discussion of the “birth pangs” listed in Matthew 24.

#### PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,  
 Help me live my life in light of your immediate return. I want to be pure, confident, and ready to see you face to face.  
 Amen



#### BE READY

Matthew 24, often called the “Olivet Discourse,” is one of Jesus’ clearest teachings on His second coming and the end of the age. Christ has just spent the previous chapter, Matthew 23, decrying the sins and hypocrisy of the corrupt religious leaders of the time. In an impassioned plea to call the Jews to repentance, Christ enjoined his listeners to watch for the Abomination of Desolation as a definitive sign of the end of the age. This devastating event is a “triple fulfillment” prophecy in history and in scripture. The first abomination of desolation occurred when Antiochus Epiphanies, the king of Syria, determined to wipe out the Jews and their religion in 168 B.C. He erected an altar to Zeus and slaughtered a pig in Holy of Holies, turned the treasury rooms into public brothels, and began brutal persecution of the Jews. Jesus prophesied that history would repeat itself in His generation, and the tragic destruction of the temple occurred when the Roman general Titus desecrated the Holy of Holies in 70 A.D. Again, great persecution ensued. The Romans believed the Jews had hidden gold in the mortar of the Temple bricks, so every stone was torn down, exactly as Jesus had promised. The third catastrophic fulfillment will occur in the future when the false prophet will place an image of the anti-christ on the altar in the Holy of Holies, and the image will come to life (2 Thessalonians 2:2-4). Murder, torture and the persecution to end all persecutions begins—world-wide! Jesus gives us other clues about the last days in the Olivet discourse, but the key to this passage is Christ’s command to BE READY.

- Read Matthew 24 in its entirety. What would “deception” look like, according to Jesus?

- In Genesis 3:1-14, we read the first biblical account of deception. Who was deceived? How did the serpent deceive her? How did she rationalize her behavior?
- What are some ways that we can avoid being deceived?

### THE PARABLE OF THE FOOLISH VIRGINS

Jesus gave us a clear picture of what “readiness” looks like in his parable about wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-8:

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'" (NIV)

Jesus then described the desperate attempt of the foolish virgins to obtain oil from the wise ones. They were unsuccessful, and while they left to buy oil, the Bridegroom came. The parable concluded with the five foolish maidens unable to attend the feast. Understanding Hebrew wedding customs of the time is essential to applying Jesus' parable in Matthew 25. In Christ's day, the wedding would commence when the bridegroom arrived and he would appear at the time of his own choosing. His coming could be within the range of certain days or weeks, so the bridal party had to be prepared at any moment. Often, the bridegroom would delight in trying to catch them napping. The ladies would often have a look-out who would stay awake during the night to warn the party of his approach. They then would meet the groom on the street, and then proceed to the festivities. The lesson of Jesus is that there are some things that cannot be left to the last minute, and there are some responsibilities that cannot be transferred to someone else. Each of us is responsible to be ready for the coming of Christ, regardless of the day or the hour. The oil that the wise virgins saved was the oil of the Holy Spirit, a common reference in the Old and New Testament. In Romans 8:9, Paul wrote that the indwelling Holy Spirit prepares us to meet Christ at His return. Paul's letter to the Ephesians tells us that the Holy Spirit is the “engagement ring” or “deposit” for the believer that promises Christ's commitment to His bride when we arrive at the heavenly wedding:

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a *deposit guaranteeing* our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13-14 NIV

The Old Testament word *ʿarab* describes a security deposit, or an engagement pledge. The similar New Testament word *arrhabon* connotes part of the purchase-money or property given in advance as security for the rest. This wonderful word picture assures us that if we have the Holy Spirit inside of us as believers, we are guaranteed a seat at the Wedding Feast.

- Do you ever struggle with assurance of your salvation? Read 1 John 10:27-30. Have you invited Christ into your life? Then you are His little lamb, and He will not lose you. Spend some time thanking God for that promise.
- If Jesus were to return today, would you be excited, ashamed, calm, or fearful? Why or why not?

- Do you have other “bridesmaids” in your life who are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit? Who are they? What character qualities do they demonstrate?

### THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT

Paul, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, clarified further what the concept of “being ready for the coming of the Lord” is all about. He used the same analogy-being awake instead of asleep-and then described what “being awake” looks like:

“But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 NIV

Jesus used the “thief in the night” imagery in the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24:42-43) and in Luke 12:35-40. The burglar’s approach is sudden, unexpected, and surprising. John the apostle stated the profound truth that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5-7). The beloved disciple also taught that we are “children of light.” Walking in the light connotes that we are open to the conviction and revelation of the Holy Spirit—we live clean lives with no “secret skeletons” in the closet. Christians of integrity have nothing to hide. What you see is what you get. A person who walks in the light also lives in the light of God’s truth. If Jesus taught us to be “in the know” about the signs of His coming, we would be informed, watching and waiting. A well-trained hunting dog remains on point until the hunter commands him to retrieve the prize. As believers, we must live with such alertness and sensitivity to God’s commands.

Why must we be ready? John tells us in 1 John 2:28:

“And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.” NIV

We have an opportunity to make every day count before Christ’s return. We can be confident when we walk intimately with Jesus. Living in the light of the urgency of our call and the hope of His rewards changes everything. Instead of walking in fear of future tribulations, we look forward to a bridegroom who has prepared a place for us!

- What are your greatest fears about the future? List them here. God says that “perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18)
- How would your daily priorities change in light of Jesus’ immediate return? Who would you see? What would you say? What opportunities would you take?
- When you love someone who is away, you often call send them a card saying that you miss them and can’t wait to see them. Write a letter to Jesus and tell Him that in your own words.

### APPLYING THE SCRIPTURES

Read the following and write your observations on the back of this sheet:

Genesis 3:1-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 23-25; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4; Romans 8:9, Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:28; 4:18; John 10:27-30