

The Sign of the End of the Age: What Jesus Taught about the Future in Matthew 24

Paul Kalbach

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The Sign of the End of the Age offers a well-grounded take on what Jesus may have meant when he offered his prophetic words.

Paul Kalbach's *The Sign of the End of the Age* offers methodical biblical scholarship about a little-agreed-upon piece of apocalyptic literature.

This is a detailed exploration of Matthew 24, Jesus's teaching about the end-time, providing commentary on each verse of the chapter. The work drills down to the Greek beneath translations to clarify the meaning of the text, tackling many individual words in context. In the process, the book covers topics such as the second coming, the rapture, and the time of tribulation, all issues that resonate strongly with more conservative strains of Christian thinking.

Kalbach argues that people can't know the hour when Jesus will bring about the great tribulation, but people can expect that the end-time will be coming. Further, he suggests that those who are in positions of power in the church have a special duty to help people be born again. Lastly, the book suggests that most people will not be ready and will face Jesus's wrath, although some will be elected and raptured to safety.

The work is comprehensive in scope, looking not just at Matthew but also at related texts from the letters of Paul and the Hebrew prophets, which will satisfy those who are looking to more fully dive into some of the complicated theological and biblical challenges behind notions of the rapture.

Kalbach's insights are more textual than theological. This is a work concerned with how to best understand the text, placing it in context of other parts of the Bible, and seeking to describe a coherent narrative as a result. This exegetical work is well done, although more specific sourcing of the material could aid biblical scholars.

The book takes it as a given that the best way to read the Bible is through a literal interpretation, what it describes as a "plain reading," asserting that much can be gained from such approaches. This might not be everyone's method, but for those for whom it resonates, the work can be received as a great resource for understanding a complicated passage. Its line by line deconstructions are useful and help to highlight current streams of biblical thinking and Christian belief.

The book's insistence on such a close reading allows a number of related issues to rise to the fore, including the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. These digressions and explorations help raise *Sign* up from being just a standard commentary.

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