

The Prophecies of the Christ; a Brief Exposition of the Olivet Discourse

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Matthew 24-25 records what is known as the Olivet Discourse. It is so named because it took place as Jesus “**sat on the Mount of Olives**” (Matthew 24:3). We find parallel accounts in Mark 13 and Luke 21 as well. Most of this teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is prophetic in nature. The primary purpose of prophecy in Scripture is to build up our faith in God. When we learn that all of His Counsel stands and will be fulfilled, we begin to trust God more and more as we live out our lives before Him. Jesus Himself said that “**heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will by no means pass away**” (Matthew 24:35). In this brief exposition we will examine Matthew 24:1-42. In doing so, we endeavor to seek the plainest sense of the passage in context and in harmony with the accounts of the same discourse recorded in the other Gospels. I strongly encourage the reader to follow along in the Bible as many passages will be referenced to in this exposition.

The disciples ask Jesus three questions in Matthew 24:3. They wish to know when the things spoken of in the previous verse will happen, what the sign of Jesus’ (Second) Coming will be, and what the sign of the end of the age will be. Jesus does not answer these questions in order, but He does answer all three over the course of His teaching.

Jesus begins with the church age. He speaks in Matthew 24:5 of false teachings and Messiahs appearing on the scene. Historically, this is exactly what happened and continues to happen to this day. Beware of counterfeit gospels that deny the Deity and Work of Jesus Christ. Do not even give them the time of day (Galatians 1:6-9). Jesus also speaks of localized warfare in verse 6 as characteristic of the church age.

Next, Jesus addresses the third question posed to Him in Matthew 24:3 which is in regard to the sign of the end of the age. In Matthew 24:7, Jesus prophesies worldwide wars and tragedies. Notice in verse 8, Jesus states that such are “**the beginning of sorrows**”. These things mean the end is coming, but do not necessarily mean the end is coming now or tomorrow. Beware of speculating about the time of the end (Matthew 24:36). If God in His Wisdom did not even tell the Son the exact timing when He was on earth, He isn’t going to be telling any self styled preacher today either.

Now turn to Luke 21:12-19. Here we have material not in Matthew that will help us get the big picture. Jesus says “**before all these things**”. Before all what things? In the context He is speaking of the sorrows and signs spoken of in Luke 21:11. Therefore, when we read through verse 19, we know Jesus is speaking of persecution in the church age in general, and particularly the Apostolic experiences.

Let us stay in Luke a little while longer. Jesus answers the disciples’ first question which was when the events of Matthew 24:2 (and Luke 24:6) will occur. In Luke 21:20-24, He predicts the events that would occur just prior to and including the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 in detail. These events were recorded by Josephus in his writings and other historical sources. Such was the judgment against the nation of Israel alluded to in Matthew 23 which came as a result of Israel’s rejection of its Messiah.

Now we return to Matthew’s account. In Matthew 24:9-14 we find the account of the first half of the seven-year Tribulation period prophesied of hundreds of years earlier in Daniel 9:27, amongst other places. “**Then**” in verse 9 means after the sorrows of verse 8 have had their fulfillment. There is the persecution of the saints by the worldwide apostate church (Matthew 24:9-14, Revelation 6:9-11, Revelation 17:1-6). We cannot know for certain the identity of the apostate church, so we should not speculate on that. There will be a rise of false prophets—also mentioned in Zechariah 13:2-6. There will be a rise of sin, or lawlessness, as a result of the rise of the man of sin and his influence as well as

the 'reduced activity' of God the Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). On the positive side if one can use that adjective, the first half of the Tribulation will also be characterized by the worldwide preaching of the Gospel. This evangelism will be accomplished primarily through the 144, 000 Jews mentioned in Revelation 7:2-12. We know they are Jews and not Jehovah's Witnesses—as that cult claims—because they are identified by tribe. We also know that there is an innumerable multitude with God in heaven in His presence by Revelation 7:9.

Matthew 24:15-28 recounts the events of the Second Half of the Tribulation, also known as the Great Tribulation. This period is inaugurated by the setting up of the “**abomination of desolation**” in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10, Revelation 13:11-15). This event will involve idol worship and essentially the Antichrist setting himself up as a god. The Jews alive at that time are advised to flee when they see this happen. Scripture seems to indicate that the place they are to flee to will be Bozrah, or Petra (Isaiah 34:1-7, 63:1-6, Micah 2:12-13, Habakkuk 3:3). There will be false messiahs and prophets arising at that time. Antichrist and his false prophet will hold sway over the earth in those days (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10, Revelation 13:11-15). Demonicly inspired miracles will be performed as they were in the days of Pharaoh (Exodus 7:22, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). We should learn two things from this. First, we should be suspicious of those who claim to be prophets and miracle workers. Second, we should know the Word of God which is the standard by which we can test all things. The last point we will make here is that according to Matthew 24:25-27, the Second Coming will be visible to all people alive at the time. In this way it is different than both the First Advent of Christ and the Rapture (More on that later).

In Matthew 24:29-31, Jesus answers the disciples' second question posed in verse three as to the sign of His (Second) Coming and expounds further upon their third question about the sign of the end of the age. God shuts the lights off and a worldwide blackout ensues. Then the Glory of God, or Shechinah Glory, is revealed. At that time God will gather His people together unto Himself.

Next we turn to the parable of the fig tree recorded in Matthew 24:32-35. The fig tree does not represent Israel, as modern day date-setters often contend. The reference here is to trees in general. Jesus simply uses it as an everyday illustration, just as today we might use a pine tree or an oak tree if they happened to be in the area where we were. In the context of our passage, Jesus is referring in verse 34 to the generation that is alive at the time of these events; namely, the Tribulation generation—not any generation alive before that including our own.

Matthew 24:36-42 is best understood in the context of the Rapture of the church. Verse 36 speaks of God alone knowing the timing of future events hold true here and also holds true generally. The panorama of human history falls under the maxim that “**the secret things belong to the LORD our God**” (Deuteronomy 29:29). If we cannot set a Rapture date, it follows that neither can we set an end time date. The Rapture is the calling out of God’s church to meet Jesus in the air at an unknown point in history prior to the beginning of the Tribulation. Those believers alive at that time will be translated in the manner of Enoch and Elijah into bodies fit for heaven in an instant without experiencing natural death. We find this event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. This event is distinct from the Second Coming by the fact that far from being obvious to all, everyone is going about his or her business and some people simply disappear (Matthew 24:36-42).

The Olivet Discourse teaches us many things. We should be watchful and ready to meet Jesus Christ today, and every day. We do not know whether we will be a part of the Rapture (or for unbelievers, Tribulation) generation. Like all before us with the exception of only two men, we may die a natural death. We go to meet our Maker either way. What will he find you doing when your number is up? Will you be found a good and faithful servant? Are you ready?