

The Olivet Discourse

Luke 21:5-24

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There are four, major sermons recorded for us that Jesus gave in the Gospels. First we have what's called the sermon on the mount, which is in Matthew 5-7. The second one is what's called the kingdom parables, which is in Matthew 13. The third one is the upper room discourse, found in John 13-17. He gave this discourse to His disciples in the upper room the night He would be arrested. And the fourth one is our text, the Olivet discourse, which is the longest sermon Jesus ever gave in answer to a question He was asked. He was asked some questions, and His answer was the Olivet discourse.

The Olivet discourse is also recorded in Matthew 24-25. Obviously that is the longest, fullest, most complete recording of this sermon. It is also recorded in Mark 13 and in our text, Luke 21.

What is the Olivet discourse? It basically is Jesus' teaching while sitting on the mount of Olives. And His teaching is in answer to the disciples' questions. They basically asked, "When will the temple in Jerusalem be destroyed? What will be the signs leading up to its destruction? What will be the signs leading up to the Second Coming and the end of the age?" So there is a lot of prophetic information that can be pumped into these verses. So the Olivet discourse is about Jesus speaking about future events.

Matthew 24-25 focuses more on the Second Coming and the signs that will happen before that. This section emphasizes more and goes into more detail about the signs of the tribulation, known as "Jacob's trouble," and the Second Coming than does Mark 13 or Luke 21. Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke actually breaks away even further, so it is a very abbreviated record of the Olivet discourse. He focuses more on the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies under Titus in 70 AD.

So the disciples asked Jesus, "When will the temple be destroyed?" Jesus said it would happen when the armies gather around Jerusalem. It was fulfilled in 70 AD when Titus and the Roman legions destroyed the city of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The Jews were dispersed; they became the Jews of the diaspora. Then in 1948 Israel was born once again as a nation in their homeland.

The focus in Matthew is the Second Coming, while the focus in Luke is on the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. That is a closer event to us than those mentioned in Matthew 24-25.

First we need to know why we should study Bible prophecy. Christians disagree on the answers; we don't always agree on what the Bible teaches about why we should study Bible prophecy.

Number one, we should study Bible prophecy because it's in the Bible. Of the 260 chapters in the New Testament, there are 318 references to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In the

New Testament alone, one out of every thirty verses makes reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And in the Old Testament, it's a common theme. So it's merely the volume of verses about the Second Coming that make it important to study.

I don't believe the rapture is in the Old Testament, and I don't believe the rapture is in the Olivet discourse. Don't confuse the rapture with the Second Coming.

Number two, we study Bible prophecy because it's beneficial. It helps to cleanse us.

1 John 3:3 says, "And everyone who has this hope in Him..." referring to Jesus' coming "...purifies himself, just as He is pure." If you believe Jesus is coming back, you're going to be living in holiness and purity.

Number three, Bible prophecy comforts us, John 14. I don't believe John 14 is about the Second Coming; it's about the rapture. But it shows us that Jesus went to heaven, He's preparing a place for us and He'll come again for His bride, the church. He'll catch us up to meet Him in the clouds, and we'll be in heaven forever with the Lord. So that comforts us. He said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

It's very common today in the church that evangelical, conservative Christians are abandoning the doctrine of the rapture. They take the rapture and the Second Coming and put them together as one. They don't see that they are clearly two, separate events in Scripture.

So it brings comfort to our hearts to know that the Lord will come and take us to heaven.

Number four, prophecy compels us, 1 Corinthians 15:58. Paul says, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." So we know we are going to be rewarded by the Lord. We will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:23).

I have a simplified chart of the timeline of prophecy. Jesus died at the Crucifixion and then there was the Resurrection and Ascension. Forty days after His Resurrection, the Holy Spirit came, in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost.

What is sometimes missed about the day of Pentecost is that the church was born on that day. We live in the church age, but when did it start? The only Biblical explanation could be the coming of the Holy Spirit, when the church, the body of Christ, was formed. That was the birthday of the church. The church age has been ongoing for about 2,000 years. But the church age will come to a conclusion when the church is raptured. That is mentioned in John 14, 1 Thessalonians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 15.

I want you to note the difference between the rapture and the Second Coming. At the rapture the church will go up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). After the rapture and before the end of the seven years of tribulation, then and only then can the Antichrist be revealed. He signs a covenant with Israel for seven years.

All this talk about peace in the Middle East—it isn't going to happen until Jesus Christ comes back. But the Antichrist, a false Christ, will bring a pseudo peace. For seven years there will be peace. But the last three-and-a-half years of the tribulation is when God's wrath will be poured out.

At the end of the tribulation, Jesus will come back in His Second Coming. So I believe in a pre-millennial return of Jesus Christ to the earth—and only a pre-millennial Second Coming of Jesus Christ to bring in the kingdom age.

It's the only view that allows you to interpret the prophetic Scriptures literally. We take into account that the Bible uses types, metaphors and analogies, but we take a literal interpretation of the prophecies given to Abraham and David in the Old Testament.

Christ comes back with the church at the Second Coming, Revelation 19. The Second Coming is mentioned all through the Old Testament and all through the New Testament. But the rapture is only mentioned in the New Testament; it's a New Testament revelation. And the rapture is not mentioned in the Olivet discourse.

When Jesus comes back at the end of the tribulation at His Second Coming, world war three will occur. It's called Armageddon. Jesus will then put an end to war and sit on the throne of David. It's called "the kingdom age." It's a Messianic kingdom that reigns for 1,000 years. And it's interesting that Revelation 19 says that it's 1,000 years. When the Bible says 1,000 years, it means 1,000 years. Why not take it literally? Some people spiritualize or allegorize that time frame in the text.

Then at the end of the kingdom age or the millennium, Christ will sit on the great white throne and judge the wicked and the dead. Then the wicked are cast into the lake of fire, Revelation 20, burning with brimstone. They will go to hell for all eternity. But the righteous will go into the new heaven and the new earth, which is the eternal state, when we will forever be with the Lord, Revelation 21. At the end of Revelation you will read of the glorious picture of the new heaven and the new earth.

Back to Luke 21. I want to outline our text. Verses 5-7 is the setting. And there are a lot of similarities between this and Matthew 24 and 25 and Mark 13. "Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He..." that is, Jesus "... said, 'These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.'" That is Jesus' prophecy of the utter destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

"So they..." We know the "they" here, from Mark 13, refers to Peter, James, John and Andrew, Jesus' disciples. "So they asked Him, saying, 'Teacher, but when will these things be?'" First question. "'And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?'" Second question. Basically they asked, "When will the temple be destroyed?" and "What are the signs that it will happen?" Jesus will go on down to verse 24 answering the first question.

From Matthew 24, if you back up into Matthew 23, leading into chapter 24, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. In verses 37-39, He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem..." with tears running down His face "...the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" Then Jesus went on to say, "See! Your house..." not only referring to the temple but also to the nation of Israel "...is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

Jesus was saying, "Your house is left desolate. I would have saved you, but you would not. Therefore you won't see Me again until I come back in the Second Coming and you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

Then in Matthew 24, they were showing Jesus the buildings of the temple, and He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." This must have blown their minds! They were showing Jesus Herod's temple. This was the embellished second temple that Zerubbabel built. Herod's gorgeous temple had been built with huge marble stones that were overlaid with gold. It was a beautiful temple.

The first temple was destroyed by Babylon. This second temple would be destroyed by Titus and the Roman armies. This temple was embellished by Herod the Great. So it became known as Herod's temple. So the disciples were looking at the temple and admiring its beauty.

The first time I went to a big city was Hong Kong. It blew my mind. I hadn't been to New York City. Hong Kong had massive buildings. Can you image someone saying, "See this city? It's all going to be razed to the ground. It'll all be destroyed"? Later I saw the twin towers in New York City come down. If you had heard someone say, "These twin towers will be brought down to the ground," you'd think they were crazy, that it was never going to happen.

The disciples, who were from Galilee and being country boys, heard the Lord say that there wouldn't be left one stone on another. The stones of the temple were massive! Some stones were the size of boxcars. And they were solid marble overlaid with gold. How would it ever be torn down to the ground?!

Verse 7, "So they asked Him, saying, 'Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?'" In Matthew 24:3 they asked, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" But our text in Luke 21: 20-24 deals with the destruction of Jerusalem.

So the disciples were blown away by Jesus' prophecy that the temple would be razed. And it was within 40 years of Jesus' death that the temple, which was started in 20 BC, was destroyed in 70 AD. The Jews put their faith, their confidence, their heart and the center of their nation in the temple. From 70 AD to this day, the Jews do not have another temple.

Some are getting ready for that, but right now the temple mount is overrun with Muslims. There is the Dome of the Rock, the al-Aqsa Mosque. You can't just walk up there and pray. We can't

take our Bibles up there. We can't preach Christ up there. It's all controlled by Israel, but they've given it over to the Gentiles; the Muslims are running the temple mount. We're going to see that Jesus closes with the idea that Jerusalem will be overrun with the Gentiles "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

Basically the disciples were blown away that the temple, the heart and soul of their nation, could be destroyed. So they wanted to know when that would happen and what the signs of it happening would be.

The next section is in verses 8-11, the general signs of this age. The first sign is of false christs and deception. And there also will be wars, rumors of wars, famine, pestilence are things that will exist until the Lord comes back. But these are not specific signs that predict the destruction of the temple or the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It's just that they will intensify to the point of what Jesus called "labor pains" (1 Thessalonians 5:3) or "the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8).

Jesus is no longer in the temple but is now seated on the mount of olives teaching His disciples, and He began to answer their questions, starting in verse 8. "And He said: 'Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, "I am He..." or the Messiah "...and, "The time has drawn near." Therefore do not go after them.'"

false christs and false messiahs. I remember back in the early '70s that there were newspaper articles in the Los Angeles Times that Jesus Christ had returned, and he was living in an apartment in London, England. People got on a plane and went to check it out. No, thank you. A few years ago there was a man in the Philippines who claimed to be Jesus. There were thousands of people who followed him. And these false christs predicted that the end was here. Don't be deceived.

Satan's number one tactic is deception. The number one thing the devil wants to do is to deceive you. He wants you to follow false doctrine, to get you to follow a false teacher, to follow a false christ. In the last days we know that apostasy will increase. People will "depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons."

So verses 8-11 are general signs of this age. These signs have existed from the day of Pentecost and will exist until the coming again of Jesus Christ.

The second sign is not spiritual deception but is wars, rumors of wars and divisions, verses 9-10. "But when you hear of wars and commotions..." Matthew says "rumors of wars" "...do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately." In other words, it's not gonna happen yet.

What do we do when wars break out? We freak out—even Christians. As long as man has been on the earth there have been wars. And these wars, calamities and deceptions are all a result of man's sin. The fall of man in the garden of Eden brought all these things on the scene. It's the state of the world we live in until Jesus comes back and sits on the throne of

David, until we have “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). So don’t be freaked out. Don’t be terrified. Don’t be fearful.

“Then He said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.’” So there will be wars and “rumors of wars.”

The third sign is disasters, verse 11. “And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.” These are not specific signs of the tribulation. They happen now; we have famines, pestilences and earthquakes. Matthew’s Gospel is helpful with this. Jesus said, “All these are the beginning of sorrows.” And “sorrows” are birth pains.

You women who have given birth to children know about birth pains. The husbands just observe. You know that the pains generally start out light and then get stronger and stronger and closer together until it becomes one, big pain and the baby is born.

That is a picture of what it will be like in the world. It will get stronger and stronger, darker and darker until the birth of the new age when the King returns. It will be the darkest just before the dawn.

So this pictures only the “beginning of sorrows,” and we aren’t to panic and freak out. We aren’t to predict a date when the Lord returns. Jesus said, “Of that day and hour no one knows...but My Father only” (Matthew 24:36). We trust Him to know the time.

But there will be earthquakes, and they will intensify. There will be famines, and they will get worse. And there will be pestilences that intensify. There will be fearful sights and great signs that will happen just before the Second Coming. But these things will also be happening all along until we get there.

Verses 12-19 is unique to Luke. Only Luke’s Gospel records this. Jesus begins by saying, “But before all these things...” meaning the signs, referring back to verses 8-11 “...they will lay their hands on you and persecute you.” He wanted to warn His followers that it wouldn’t be easy; they would be hated and persecuted. And Christians have been persecuted ever since Jesus went back to heaven.

Jesus said they would be “...delivering you up to the synagogues...” so there will be Jews would believe “...and prisons,” meaning Gentiles believers will be thrown into prison. “You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake.” You can read about that in the book of Acts in the history of the church, and it’s even happening today. “But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.” You’ll be arrested and brought before kings, but you’ll have an opportunity to preach the Gospel and testify. Their testing will become a time of testimony.

Luke wrote the book of Acts as well. Luke and Acts go well together. We see in Acts how Paul, Peter, John and the disciples were arrested and brought before the magistrates. God filled them with the Spirit, and they were able to preach powerful sermons about Christ.

Verse 14, "Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer." That's an interesting statement. Jesus said they shouldn't put a sermon together beforehand, so when you get arrested you'll know what to say. He said to trust Him, and the Holy Spirit would give them the words to day.

But this is not an excuse for lazy preachers not to study before they preach. Some say, "I don't need to study; Jesus made a promise to fill my mouth." One of my favorite Bible teachers of years past was Harry Allen Ironside. He pastored the Moody Church in Chicago for many years. He had some young, whipper snapper in seminary come to him and say, "Pastor Ironside, the Lord showed me in His Word that I don't have to study to preach the Gospel. I just have to open my mouth, and God will fill it!" Pastor Ironside said, "Young man, He'll fill it alright—with the east wind."

So it's not an excuse to abandon the study of the Bible. But if you are arrested, God will fill you with His Spirit and give you an opportunity to testify. Notice verse 15: "...for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist." So your trial will turn to testimony and your opposition will turn to opportunity. "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives..." even your own family will persecute you "...and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake."

Think about how bizarre this is. If you love Jesus and live for Him, who is grace, mercy and kindness, the world hates you. Jesus went around doing nothing but good—healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, preaching love and forgiveness—and now we, His followers, are hated because of Jesus. In Acts 7, Stephen was stoned and died for his faith.

Verse 18, "But not a hair of your head shall be lost." How can He say in verse 16 that some of you will die, "but not a hair of your head shall be lost"? Is that contradictory? No. He means that even though you will be martyred and put to death, you will not perish eternally; you will have salvation and go to heaven. Even if you are put to death, you will be with the Lord.

Verse 19, "By your patience possess your souls." "Patience" means your "steadfast endurance" or "to abide under pressure." It means you show evidence of your salvation and you have eternal life.

Now the last section, verses 20-24, deals very specifically with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD by Titus and the Roman armies in the war with the Jews. Josephus recorded it in great detail. He said that over a million Jews died in those few weeks of the siege. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were slain by the sword.

But it's interesting that the Christians who lived in Jerusalem at that time remembered what Jesus said about the event in this sermon, and they fled to the mountains and hills and were preserved.

So these verses prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus said, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near." Jesus had been

specifically asked what the signs would be of this happening, and this literally was fulfilled in 70 AD.

Now here are Jesus' instructions. "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her." So if you were out of Jerusalem, don't go back into the city. "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." Read Hosea 9:7 where the destruction of this time is prophesied.

Verse 23, "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!" It's going to be very difficult at that time. "For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people." This prophecy is for the Jewish people. "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations." This is the diaspora. "And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles..." and He gives us the time frame "...until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

This is the section of Luke's Gospel that deals mainly with Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD. But it also has a secondary, further fulfillment. A lot of prophecy has an immediate fulfillment and then a far fulfillment. The prophets would speak about something that would happen immediately and also have a secondary application in the future.

I believe that "the times of the Gentiles" refers to the period from 521 BC when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and dispersed the Jews in the diaspora to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This is the time when Jerusalem will be overrun with Gentiles. Jerusalem is the issue; it will become the burdensome stone. "It shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples" (Zechariah 12:3). It's not what is going on in Iran today. Jerusalem is going to be the focus. God says that it becomes a burdensome stone around the neck of the nations.

But Jerusalem is overrun from the time of Babylon destroying the temple and the people of God, the nation of Israel, until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It's called "the times of the Gentiles."

A few thoughts about this. Romans 11:12 mentions what is called the "riches for the Gentiles." It says, "If there fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" This refers to the Gentiles who now are allowed to be grafted in to the covenant promises of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Gentiles are wild olive branches grafted in, and they are beneficiaries of the new covenant. We can be forgiven, saved and become part of the church. That is the "riches" of the Gentiles: saved by grace.

Then there is the other title of "fullness of the Gentiles." What does that mean? Romans 11:25 says, "Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." This is when the church will be complete, when the last Gentile gets saved and is added to the body of Christ. The bride will be complete. Then the church will "be caught up...to meet the

Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is the rapture of the church.

So there are three terms we need to understand. The "riches for the Gentiles" means we get to be saved and are beneficiaries of the covenant God made with Israel; the "fullness of the Gentiles" means when the church is complete, it will be raptured; and then in our text, "Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." That takes us up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream in which he saw a large statue. This statue was a picture of the world-ruling, Gentile nations from Babylon to the Second Coming. Its head of gold represented Babylon when "the times of the Gentiles" started. The statue had a breast and arms of silver representing when Babylon was overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire. It had a belly and thighs of brass representing the Grecian Empire under Alexander the Great. It had two legs of iron representing the Roman Empire. And it had two feet with 10 toes made of iron and clay mingled together representing the revived Roman Empire. It will be the last, world-ruling empire before Jesus comes back.

The king, in his dream, saw a stone cut out of heaven coming to earth smiting this large statue representing Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and the revived Roman Empire, through which the Antichrist will come. The heavens will open, the lightning will come "from the east and flashes to the west" (Matthew 24:27), Jesus Christ, the smiting stone, will come back and smite the statue on the feet, and the whole statue will crumble. That will be the end of the kingdoms of man. That will be the fulfillment of "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Don't you long for that day? As I watch the news about what's going on in the Middle East right now, my heart cries, "Come, Lord Jesus, come!" Our only hope is the Lord Jesus Christ. The world will get darker, but we can trust God's Word; Jesus Christ is coming again.

But right now we, as Christians, have a job to do. "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).