

The Olivet Discourse - Part 2

Luke 21:25-32

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Earlier in Luke 21, Jesus left the temple, Herod's temple. The first temple was Solomon's temple, destroyed by Babylon. The second temple was built by Zerubbabel and was embellished and enlarged by Herod the Great and became known as Herod's temple. Jesus had been teaching in the temple. We are told that every day He would get up and go from Mount Olivet into the temple to teach the people, and they would come to hear Him.

As Jesus and the disciples walked out of the temple, Mark 13:1-3 tells us that one of His disciples, either Peter, James, John or Andrew, said, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" Then Jesus said, "Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down." In Luke 21, Jesus addresses first and mainly the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which happened in 70 AD.

The next questions the disciples asked were, "When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). These questions are more completely answered in Matthew 24.

The Olivet discourse is found in Matthew 24-25, in Mark 13 and in Luke 21. Each of these Gospels have a different emphasis. Some add things and some omit things, so you have to put them all together in order to get a clear picture of this teaching. It's almost impossible to give all this in one sermon.

But now when we come to Luke 21:25, Luke won't be talking about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD by Titus, but he's going to be going into the future to the tribulation period or "the day of the Lord" or "the time of Jacob's trouble." There will be definite, world signs that the end is near and Jesus is coming back. The Second Coming I believe is actually a sign in itself of the end of the age.

I have a chart that shows us the prophecy timeline of the future. Jesus died on the Cross, He rose from the dead and 40 days later He ascended to heaven. Then the Holy Spirit descended and the church was born on Pentecost, in Acts 2. So now we have a dispensation of grace, which is the church age. That age will end with the rapture. The rapture happens when the church will be "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17; also John 14 and 1 Corinthians 15:51). But the rapture is not the same event as the Second Coming; those are two, separate events. The rapture is only for the church, and during the seven-year tribulation on earth, the church will already be in heaven with Christ.

The tribulation is found in Daniel 9. God gave a marvelous prophecy to Daniel, called "the ABCs of Bible prophecy"; that there would be a time period when God would fulfill His plan and purpose for the nation of Israel. It included this last period of time called "the 70th week of Daniel," which is one, seven-year period known as "the tribulation." All the Old Testament, the

New Testament and the prophetic book of Revelation come together with these important, eschatological truths.

So the tribulation will be seven years long, and in the middle of the tribulation, we will see one of the signs that the end is near. It's "the abomination of desolation" (Daniel 9:27). And at the end of the tribulation will be the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, Revelation 19. He will come back and sit on the throne in Jerusalem as a fulfillment of the Davidic promise that the Messiah would be in David's line and would reign on the throne of David. This was a promise God also gave to Abraham.

God always keeps His promises. What God has spoken cannot be broken. So there will be a physical, literal reign on the earth for 1,000 years or for a millennium, Revelation 20. At the end of the kingdom age, there will be a great white-throne judgment for all the wicked dead. And John says in Revelation 21-22, that he saw a new heaven and a new earth. The old had passed away.

Now what we will cover in Luke 21:25-32 will be the tribulation period and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. I have divided our text into four sections. The first section is verses 25-28, the prophecy or the signs that will precede the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus wasn't talking about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD here but about a future time.

Jesus will give us signs showing that the end is near. Remember that this is not the rapture; the rapture isn't anywhere in Matthew 24-25, in Mark 13 or here in Luke 21. Nowhere in the Olivet discourse is there any teaching about the rapture. It's all about the Second Coming. When the disciples asked the question, "What will be the sign of Your coming?" they were referring to the Second Coming. They didn't know anything about the rapture. That was a mystery that would be revealed later in the New Testament.

Verse 25, "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity..." meaning there will be no solution to what is going on "...the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then..." and not until then "...they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." That's the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

What Jesus does here is He simply gives us two—I'll give you three—signs of His coming. The first sign I'll pull from Matthew 24:15: "the abomination of desolation." Jesus said, "When you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet..." in Daniel 9 "...standing in the holy place...then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." God will begin to pour out His wrath on this Christ-rejecting world and work in the tribulation to bring the nation of Israel to repentance. Many in Israel will be saved. So "the abomination of desolation" starts the second half of the great tribulation or "Jacob's trouble."

What is “the abomination of desolation”? The tribulation starts when the Antichrist makes a covenant with Israel for seven years. Most likely part of that covenant agreement is that Israel is allowed to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

A footnote to this is that I don't believe the Antichrist can be revealed until the church is raptured. I believe what is restraining the Antichrist from coming on the scene is the presence of God's people, the church. But can you imagine when the church is raptured what the world will be like?! Can you imagine how dark the world will become?! The church is “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13), so the world will become corrupt without it.

Then in the middle of the covenant, three-and-a-half years in, the Antichrist goes into the temple in Jerusalem and erects an image of himself, similar to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image the people were required to worship (Daniel 3:5). The Antichrist will command everyone to worship his image in the temple. That will desecrate the temple. He will institute the requirement of the mark, 666, on the right hand or on the forehead. People wouldn't be able to buy or sell unless they had this mark. So he basically will take control of the world; he's a one-world ruling dictator. He takes Christ's place and is against Christ. So the Antichrist desecrates the Jewish temple, and they realize he is not their Messiah or their deliverer. That will be a sign to the Jews living in Jerusalem that the Lord is coming back, the end is near and they are to run to the hills.

The second sign is the tribulation period, verses 25-26. “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken.” The tribulation period will be a time when all of creation, the entire cosmos, will be shaken.

This is something that is prophesied in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Isaiah 13:9-11,13 says, “Behold, the day of the Lord...” referring to the tribulation period that Jesus described in Luke 21:25-26 “...comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible....Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger.” This is just one sample of Old Testament prophecy. Luke says the same thing here in Luke 21:25-26.

There was a beautiful “honey” moon that rose last night in the eastern sky. The moon had a beautiful glow, like a jar of honey. This month we'll have two full moons, two honey moons, and planet alignments. There will be radical meteorite showers. But that doesn't mean the Lord is coming this month.

Yet when the Lord does come back, everything that we think lasts a long time will be shaken.

Jesus created the heavens and the earth. Jesus came the first time with a star in the eastern sky that heralded His coming. When He comes back the second time, there will be stars that will go black, the moon won't shine, the stars will fall out of the sky and the sun will go dark. All these cataclysmic events will happen to creation when the Creator comes back in His glorious Second Coming.

So the first sign will be "the abomination of desolation," Matthew 24:15; the great tribulation will be the second sign, Luke 21:25-26; and the third sign is described in Revelation 6:12-17. It says, "I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"

This is not the rapture. There are no specific signs given us in the church age when the rapture will take place. We are to be living for God and looking constantly for the Lord's return.

So all the signs and prophecies in the Bible are predicting the marvelous Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the kingdom age and the new heaven and the new earth.

Here we have the tribulation or the time of "Jacob's trouble," Jeremiah 30:7. And it is also mentioned in Daniel 9:27 and in Matthew 24:21-22 where Jesus said, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake..." those who come to Christ during the tribulation "...those days will be shortened."

The third sign is the Second Coming, verses 27-28 of our text. "Then they will see the Son of Man..." which is a Messianic title from Daniel that Jesus most often used of Himself "...coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

One time a guy told me that if you weren't looking up, you wouldn't get raptured. That would mean that all Christians would have to walk around always looking up!

These two verses are actually for the Jews and for tribulation believers after the rapture to know that the Second Coming is near. Jesus refers to the Second Coming as "your redemption."

One of the greatest, grandest, most glorious themes in all the Bible is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. He will come back as "Lord of lords and King of kings" (Revelation 17:14). Aren't you longing for that? I am. Every time we pray, "Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10) we are praying for the millennium. In order to have the

kingdom on earth, we have to have the King return. So the sign of the end of the age is the coming of Jesus Christ. You can read about it in Revelation 19.

The tribulation is spoken of in Revelation 6-18. Then and only then does Christ return, and He will rule on earth for 1,000 years. Then there will be the new heaven and the new earth.

So there are signs that He is coming soon and that the end is near. The first is "the abomination of desolation," which happens during the tribulation. The church won't be here, because we will be in heaven with Christ. The second sign is the tribulation itself, which is the 70th week of Daniel. And the third sign is the coming again of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:27). The Bible says, "Every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7). So it will be a glorious coming.

In Acts 1:11, when Jesus ascended back into heaven up into a cloud, an angel said to His disciples who witnessed it, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." Jesus ascended visibly, physically, gloriously in a cloud, and He will come back in His Second Coming the same way.

Notice that verse 28 says that it is "your redemption." I like the word "redemption," which means "to bury, to purchase." Right now we are forgiven and saved and going to heaven, but our bodies are not yet redeemed. The Bible says that "In this [body] we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven" (2 Corinthians 5:2). I fulfill Scripture every morning when I get up and groan. And Paul says, "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53).

But for those who don't go up in the rapture but get saved during the tribulation after going through that horrible time, Jesus will come back and it will be their salvation, their redemption. Christ is coming again. God will physically restore and redeem planet earth during the kingdom age, and then there will be a new heaven and a new earth. How marvelous that is, all the prophecy in verses 25-28.

The second section is verses 29-33. So we move from prophecy or the signs predicted to the parable of the fig tree. Matthew and Mark also mention this parable. "Then He spoke to them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.'" Notice that Jesus included all trees. Jesus will tell us what this parable is about: "When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near."

Jesus didn't say that the fig tree was Israel. I don't believe this is a picture of the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948. Any interpretation of the parable of the fig tree that allows you to set any date or time is a wrong interpretation. One method of interpreting Scripture is when the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense.

Jesus is simply saying that when a fig tree that has lost all its leaves first buds, that indicates

that summer is almost here. How do we know summer is almost here? The fig tree is budding and all the trees are budding. We know from looking at nature that summer is almost here.

Jesus will then go on to say, "So you also, when you see these things happening..." the things of the tribulation we read about in verses 25-26. So this sign is for those living during the tribulation "...know that the kingdom of God is near."

Then Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place." Don't set a time for these things to take place. Back in the early '70s I was a Christian. Everybody was so excited about Israel's rebirth in 1948. A generation is 40 years, so they were calculating these things would happen in 1988. A man wrote a book about eighty-eight reasons why Jesus was coming in 1988. He didn't come in 1988. Some say you have to subtract seven years, so it would be 1981. He didn't come in 1981.

That's why I say any interpretation of the fig tree that allows you to set dates is a wrong interpretation. All Jesus was doing was using the fig tree as a picture of the seasons, so when you see the fig tree budding, you'll know summer is near. So when you see "the abomination of desolation," when you see the tribulation, when you see the sun turn black, the moon darken, then you know that Jesus' coming is soon.

Verses 31-32, "So you also, when you see these things happening,..." in context, it's the things of the tribulation "...know that the kingdom of God..." which is the millennium or the 1,000-year reign "...is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place." I believe this means the generation that is on the earth during the tribulation; they will see the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And Jesus said, "Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, those days will be shortened."

And Verse 33 is particular only to Luke's Gospel: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." "Heaven" here refers to the sky and the stars, the planets.

I think it's fascinating that Jesus said, "My words." He is actually claiming to be God. God's Word is the only thing that will not pass away. So Jesus is affirming His deity here. No other prophet in the Bible referred to them as "My words." Only Jesus referred to them that way, or He would say, "I say unto you."

He said, "My words will by no means pass away." This was meant to be a word of encouragement. The whole universe will pass away. Everything that is seen is temporal, but His Word is eternal. What God has spoken cannot be broken.

The third section is verses 34-36. I call this preparation. Jesus now puts in a word of exhortation here. So in light of Jesus's coming again, "But take heed..." or be on guard "...to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing..." from the Greek word, we get our word "nausea"; it's a drunken hangover "...drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly."

Again, this is not for the church; it's for those who are on the earth during the tribulation. Don't get caught up in all these earthly things. Jesus also said it would be like "the days of Noah": "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage...and did not know until the flood came and took them all away" (Matthew 24:37-39). So they would be living life as though God did not exist.

Verse 35, "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things..." or the tribulation "...that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

So Jesus told us to, number one, "take heed to yourselves" or be on guard. Guard your heart. Number two, we are to "watch," which means to stay awake, stay sober and stay alert. Number three, We are to "pray." In Matthew, He also said we shouldn't be deceived, we shouldn't be afraid.

So this is an exhortation of how to respond for those who will be here when this happens. The church has already been raptured to heaven, but this is for those who remained on earth during the time of the tribulation.

I do believe people will get saved after the rapture. I believe people can receive Christ after the rapture. I believe they won't be in the church, but they can be born again and saved. They will be looking and longing for the coming again of Jesus Christ. So when they see "the abomination of desolation" and the tribulation, they look for the signs of the Second Coming and know the end is near.

What of "the days of Noah" mentioned in Matthew 24? A lot of people go into signs of Noah's day to say that we are living in the last days and Jesus Christ is coming soon. I don't believe Biblically and from an interpreting standpoint that this is a sound way to handle this Scripture. People usually say that there was population growth, homosexuality was rampant and they talk about all those signs that were in "the days of Noah."

That's not what Jesus was saying in Matthew. Jesus said, "But as the days of Noah were...." He went on to say what it was like. "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage (Matthew 24:37-38). There is nothing wrong with that. He was simply saying that in Noah's day they were living as though the end was not coming. Eating, drinking and marrying were fine. Jesus was saying that people during the end time will be just like Noah and the flood; people didn't believe God was going to flood the earth until the rain started, the ark was closed and the boat started lifting off its foundation. Then they were beating on the ark. "Let us in!!" Jesus is simply saying to be ready and be watchful. Look for the Lord to come. So He's warning those who will be on the earth during the time of the tribulation.

The conclusion or the fourth section of our text is in verses 37-38, which is the popularity of Christ. This is actually a transition into the passion events in Luke 22, 23 and 24. "And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain

called Olivet. Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him.” This is a transition from Jesus in the temple teaching to Jesus being betrayed by Judas in the garden of Gethsemane and then being crucified. So the people loved Him, but Judas would betray Him.

If you knew you were going to be arrested and crucified on a cross, you wouldn’t be hanging out in the temple teaching. I’d be heading for the hills. I’d get myself a donkey that had a very fast “motor” in it, and I’d be smokin’ it out o’ town! But Jesus set His face like flint; every day He came to the temple to teach. He wasn’t afraid. He did agonize in the garden of Gethsemane, but each of His last couple of days on earth He taught in the temple. And at night, He went out to the mountain of olives and slept under the olive trees with His disciples. Maybe He also went over the mountain to Bethany and stayed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But He came every day to teach the people in the temple. I like that Jesus said that His timing was in the hands of His Father. He was there to die on the Cross.

As far as prophecy is concerned, don’t forget three things: it cleanses us—“Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3); it comforts us—it comforts our hearts knowing that Christ is coming back; and it compels us—We are to be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).