

OLIVET DISCOURSE

BY JAMES COMBS

The most complete account of the Olivet Discourse is recorded for us in Matthew 24 and 25. These two chapters were primarily written to show Jesus' offer of the kingdom to Israel, their rejection of it, and why Jesus did not usher in the kingdom at that time.

After Christ predicted that the temple complex would be torn down stone by stone, Peter, James, John, and Andrew approached Jesus privately, posing two questions (24:1-3): When will the temple complex be destroyed? And what will be the sign of Christ's coming (Gr. Parousia) and the end of the world or age (Gr. Aion)?

The first question is answered in Luke's account and was fulfilled in A.D. 70 (Luke 21:20-24). Many Bible scholars believe that the answers to the second question, concerning the "coming" and the

end of the age should be viewed in an entirely Jewish context. In other words, the disciples were asking questions as Jews – not as "*the foundation of the Church*" – while they were thinking of the end of the age (Eph. 2:20).

According to this widely accepted interpretation, Jesus analogy of the signs and "*the beginning of sorrows*" (Gr. "birth pangs") [sorrows in Matt. 24:8] relates solely to the first half of the coming seven-year Tribulation. The disciples would understand "*the gospel of the kingdom*" as being a proclamation that the Messiah was coming to reveal Himself fully as Israel's king.

Premillennial prophetic thought generally agrees that the "*signs*" culminate during the first half of the Tribulation, leading up to the abomination of desolation, or the Antichrist claiming to be God, inside the rebuilt Jerusalem temple. Unquestionably, the last half of the Tribulation is described in verses 15-26, leading up to the Glorious Coming which ends the Tribulation and introduces the Millennial Kingdom.

Some interpreters, however, say verses 4-8 also forecast the course of this entire present dispensation, the age often referred to as the Church Age. As incidents of false Christ(s), worldwide wars, famines, and earthquakes are believed to have increased and intensified in recent times, some see these signs to indicate that the whole process of the Rapture, the Tribulation, AND the glorious return of Christ are imminent and near.

According to some prophetic writers, the illustrations and thrust of verses 32-51 deal with the godly believers and the wicked at the end of the Tribulation and therefore do not apply to the Rapture. Others suggest that, beginning in verse 32 Jesus fills in further details of the end of the present age and describes the Rapture. Even if the latter half of *Matthew 24* does not specifically speak of the Rapture, the appeals to "watch" and "be ready" for a sudden coming of Christ are applicable to believers today (Matt. 24:42, 44, 46; 25:13). Therefore the Church Age (Matt. 13; 25:1-13) would also be in view in this part of the Olivet Discourse.

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The Olivet Discourse may be outlined as follows:

1. Signs of the latter days, including the first half (1260 days) of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:4-12)
2. The second half of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:15-26)
3. The glorious return of Christ (Matt. 24:27-31)
4. Parables stressing watchfulness, preparedness and faithfulness in the light of His Return (Matt. 24:32-51)
5. Parables and predictions dealing with judgment and the end of the age (Matt. 25:1-46).

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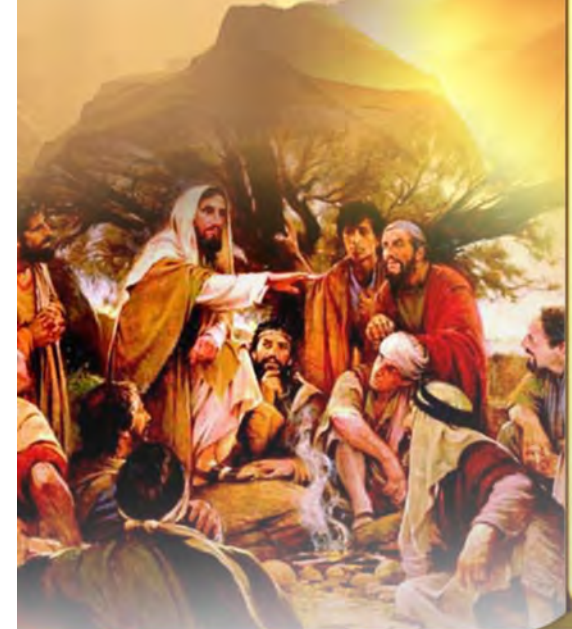


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