

CONCERNING THE WAY

April 23, 2009

LESSON 56: PROPHECY SERIES — THE OLIVET DISCOURSE



The end times according to Jesus Christ

The Olivet Discourse is a private briefing of things to come given by Jesus to His disciples, shortly before His crucifixion. It is considered by many as the most important single passage of prophecy in all the Bible. What makes it so special is that it came from Jesus Himself immediately after He was rejected by His own people and because it provides the master outline of end-time events. It is found in three of the four gospels - Matthew 24–25, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

The setting for the Olivet Discourse, at least for Matthew's account, is in the events leading up to Matthew 24. Christ had presented Himself to the nation as their Messiah, but they rejected Him. Not only did the people reject Him, but their rulers did as well. So Jesus rebukes and exposes their hypocrisy and unbelief in Matthew 22 and 23. Jesus notes that this present generation of Jewish leaders is like those from previous generations who killed the prophets (23:29-36). Christ then tells the Jewish leaders, "Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation" (23:36). What things? It will be the curse of judgment, which will come upon the Jewish people through the Roman army in A.D. 70. "*All hope for a turning of Israel to God in repentance has gone,*" says Dr. Stanley Toussaint. "*The King therefore has no alternative but to reject that nation for the time being with regard to its kingdom program. The clear announcement of this decision is seen in these verses of Matthew's Gospel.*"

Even though the Jewish people deserved the approaching judgment, like a caring parent about to give a deserved punishment, Christ cries out,

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would have none of it!"

Jesus wants to gather His people (as He will in 24:31), instead, because of their rejection of Him, He will scatter them with the A.D. 70 judgment (Luke 21:24).

Matthew 23:38 Look, your house is left to you desolate!

What is "your house"? In the context of this passage it must be a reference to the Jewish Temple. Matthew 24:1-2 is a discussion by Jesus with His disciples about the Temple. So, what Jesus says will be desolate is the Temple.

Matthew 23:39 For I tell you, you will not see me from now until you say, '*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*' "

Alfred Edersheim (1825 - 1889) was a Jewish convert to Christianity and a Biblical scholar known especially for his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883). Edersheim said of this passage:

"Looking around on those Temple-buildings—that House, it shall be left to them desolate! And He quitted its courts with these words, that they of Israel should not see Him again till, the night of their unbelief past,

they would welcome His return with a better Hosanna than that which had greeted His Royal Entry three days before. And this was the 'Farewell' and the parting of Israel's Messiah from Israel and its Temple. Yet a Farewell which promised a coming again; and a parting which implied a welcome in the future from a believing people to a gracious, pardoning King."

So this verse not only speaks of the judgment that surely came in A.D. 70, but looked to a future time of redemption for Israel because the passage contains the forward looking word "until." Luke 21:24 has another use of "until" by Jesus when He says, "and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Hebrew Christian Bible teacher, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, says Israel must call for the Lord to rescue them as a condition for the second coming, based upon Matthew 23:39. Dr. Fruchtenbaum explains:

"But then He declares that they will not see Him again until they say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. This is a messianic greeting. It will mean their acceptance of the Messiahship of Jesus. "

So Jesus will not come back to the earth until the Jews and the Jewish leaders ask Him to come back. Just as the Jewish leaders led the nation to the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus, they must some day lead the nation to the acceptance of the Messiahship of Jesus.

With these words, Jesus' public ministry on earth as a prophet came to an end. From this time on He would only deal with His disciples.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING FOR CHRIST'S DISCOURSE

Matthew 24:1-3 gives us the setting for Christ's prophetic sermon. Jesus is making His way from the Temple (24:1) to the Mount of Olives (24:3), which would mean that He most likely would travel down the Kidron Valley and on up to Olivet. As He was going from the Temple "His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him" (24:1). So they were talking to Jesus about how beautiful the Temple complex was that Herod was still in the process of remodeling and refurbishing. This is shown in the parallel references in Mark 13:1-2 and Luke 21:5-6 as the disciples speak of the beauty of the Temple buildings. The disciples must have been taken aback by the Lord's response to their gloating over the beauty of the Temple complex when He said, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down" (24:2).

At the end of verse 2, there is a break in the narrative. It picks back up in verse 3 when it says, "the disciples came to Him privately." Mark 13:3 tells us that the disciples who came to Him privately were Peter, James, John and Andrew, and that they were sitting on the Mount of Olives looking at the Temple. This would be the same vista that many have seen today when a visitor goes to the viewing point in modern Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives that overlooks the Temple Mount with the Dome of the Rock on it.

The disciples came to Jesus privately, which fits the pattern that Jesus practiced of teaching only His believing disciples once the nation rejected Him as their prophesied Messiah in Matthew 12. From Matthew 13 on, Jesus speaks publicly to the rejecting nation only in parables (Matthew 13:10-17). "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matthew 13:13). But many times He would later explain a public parable privately to His disciples (for example, Matt. 13:10-23). In the Olivet Discourse, we see Christ following this pattern. **This private explanation, which is the Olivet Discourse, means that Christ is giving His explanation of future history for the benefit of believers.**

Purpose of the Olivet Discourse

The basic purpose of the Olivet discourse is to answer the question "when and how will Christ's kingdom

come into being?" Since Israel rejected the offer of the Kingdom made by Jesus, He could not set up the Kingdom at that time. So it would be delayed until a later time. Jesus makes it clear in 23:37-39 that He will not return until Israel asks Him to return. So the Olivet Discourse tells us what will be the events that will bring about His return.

We will use all three gospels to get a complete picture of what Jesus had to say. Each of the three authors only included the information that was pertinent to the theme of his gospel.

Matthew 24:1-2 Now as Jesus was going out of the temple courts and walking away, his disciples came to show him the temple buildings. (2) And he said to them, "Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down!"

On their way out of the temple complex the disciples pointed out the impressiveness of the buildings, which were still under construction. In 20 B.C. Herod the Great started a tremendous building project to refurbish the 2nd temple, which was kind of a ramshackle structure up to that point, and expand the temple compound. So, construction had been going on for 50 years by this time, and it was not completed until 64 A.D, just six years before its destruction by the Romans in the year 70. The stones were very impressive, they were 10-12 feet in length and weighed several tons, many have been found by archeologists.

This prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Romans came and destroyed Jerusalem. During the fighting, the temple was set on fire (apparently against General Titus's orders). Because there was so much gold on the inside of the temple, it melted in the heat between the stones. So when the stones cooled down, the Romans removed them one by one to get every last bit of gold from in between them. So Jesus' prophecy was literally fulfilled exactly.

Matthew 24:3 As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately and said, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Luke 21:7 So they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that these things are about to take place?"

(also Mark 13:3-4) There are three questions here:

1. When shall these things happen? "These things", of course, is the prophecy that was just given of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. So, the first question is basically, when will the temple be destroyed?
2. What will be the sign of your coming? This is not a reference to the rapture, because the rapture is a signless event, it could happen at any time. However, Christ's 2nd coming to earth will be preceded by signs.
3. What will be the sign of the end of the age? In other words, when will the church age end?

Christ answered them, but not in the same order. Luke is the only gospel that records the answer to the first question. It seems likely to me that the disciples believed that all of their questions would have to do with the same event—the coming of Messiah. Why would they have thought this way? Dr. Toussaint notes that the disciples were influenced by the prophet Zechariah. In their minds they understood that events would play out in this order: (1) the departure of the King, (2) after a period of time the destruction of Jerusalem, and (3) immediately after Jerusalem's devastation the presence of the Messiah. They had good

reason to believe this since Zechariah 14:1-2 describes the destruction of Jerusalem. The same passage goes on to describe the coming of the Lord to destroy the nations which warred against Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:3-8). Following this the millennial kingdom is established (Zechariah 14:9-11).

In other words, the disciples thought that all three events were related to a single event—the return of the Messiah as taught in Zechariah 14:4. As we shall see, they were right to think of Zechariah 12–14 and his teaching about Messiah’s coming. But, they were wrong to assume that the coming judgment of Jerusalem and the Temple would bring the return of Messiah, as we will see.

Matthew 24:4-6 Jesus answered them, "Watch out that no one misleads you. (5) For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will mislead many. (6) You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. Make sure that you are not alarmed, for this must happen, but the end is still to come.

(also Mark 13:6-7, Luke 21:8-9) Before Jesus answers these questions, he gives some general characteristics of the church age. Jesus is making the point that these things will happen, but they are NOT signs of the end.

1. The rise of false Messiahs – from the time of Christ until about the 1850’s, many Jewish men have come along claiming to be the Messiah, and leading many astray.
2. Wars and rumors of wars – this is terminology for long periods of local wars, these have happened throughout history, and are not signs of the end.

Jesus tells His disciples that they should not be alarmed. The Greek word for alarmed is only used here, in the parallel passage of Mark 8:15, and by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. A. T. Robertson says it “*means to cry aloud, to scream, and in the passive to be terrified by an outcry.*” He translates this passage like this: “Look out for the wars and rumors of wars, but do not be scared out of your wits by them.”

So how are we to not be scared out of our wits by these things that are coming? Verse 6 - just to know that, “this must happen”. Believers should be comforted to know that if God says that something shall be, then it must be. Leon Morris says, “*They have one thing going for them that the general public has not: they know that God is over all and that his purpose will in the end be worked out.*” God is in control of what is seemingly out of control—His judgment.

Judgment is a necessary part of God’s plan because there is evil in the world. Before the Lord can bring in His kingdom—since it will be a righteous kingdom—He must purge out evil through judgment. This can be a scary thing if one does not know God and His plan. Knowing the predetermined plan of God is one of the reasons why knowing prophecy is so important. It should give comfort to us during a time of global upheaval. Judgment must happen because God is a righteous God who has limits to His patience.

Matthew 24:7-8 For nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. (8) All these things are the beginning of birth pains.

(Also Mark 13:8, Luke 21:10-11) Then Jesus begins to tell the disciples what the signs of the end will be, answering the 3rd question. Arnold Fruchtenbaum says:

“Nations rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom – this is different than the wars and rumors of wars, this is world war. This is a Hebrew idiom for world war. Jesus is saying here that when there is world war, that is the signal that the end of the age has begun. This is very much in keeping with other Jewish writings of the time. Rabbis have always taught that a worldwide conflict would signal the coming of the Messiah. They call it the “footsteps of the Messiah”. World War 1 from 1914-1918 was

a fulfillment of this prophecy, it was the first world war and the first birth pang. Historians agree that the 2nd World War was just a continuation of the first. Both wars were very integral in the re-establishment of the Jewish state. WW1 gave the impetus – the allies defeated the Ottoman Empire, which had controlled the Holy Land for 500 years. That freed up the land for the Jews. WW2 provided for the actual establishment of the nation, in that the world had compassion for the Jews because of the holocaust, and the United Nations was formed, which approved the formation of a Jewish homeland in Israel.”

So, in this view, we have been in the last days since 1914. Other scholars think that these verses will be fulfilled in the Tribulation. Most likely Jesus had in mind the Old Testament reference to birth pangs in Jeremiah 30:6–7, which says,

Jeremiah 30:6-7 Ask yourselves this and consider it carefully: Have you ever seen a man give birth to a baby? Why then do I see all these strong men grabbing their stomachs in pain like a woman giving birth? And why do their faces turn so deathly pale? (7) Alas, what a terrible time of trouble it is! There has never been any like it. It is a time of trouble for the descendants of Jacob, but some of them will be rescued out of it.

Dr. Randall Price explains the birth pangs of Messiah: *“The birth pangs are significant in the timing of the Tribulation, as revealed by Jesus in the Olivet discourse (Matt. 24:8). Jesus’ statement of the “birth pangs” is specifically that the events of the first half of the Tribulation (vv. 4-7) are merely the “beginning,” with the expectation of greater birth pangs in the second half (the “Great Tribulation”). Based on this analogy, the entire period of the seventieth week is like birth pangs. As a woman must endure the entire period of labor before giving birth, so Israel must endure the entire seven-year Tribulation. The time divisions of Tribulation are also illustrated by the figure, for just as the natural process intensifies toward delivery after labor ends, so here the Tribulation moves progressively toward the second advent (vv. 30-31), which takes place “immediately after” the Tribulation ends (v. 29). As there are two phases of the birth pangs (beginning labor and full labor), so the seven years of Tribulation are divided between the less severe and more severe experiences of terrestrial and cosmic wrath, as revealed progressively in the Olivet discourse and the judgment section of Revelation 6–19.”*

Paul also uses the motif of birth pangs in 1 Thessalonians 5:3:

1 Thessalonians 5:3 Now when they are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will surely not escape.

The context of this verse relates to the tribulation period, which fits the other uses of birth pangs.

Raphael Patai in his book “The Messiah Texts” has dozens of references to extra-biblical commentary from Jewish writings in a chapter entitled “The Pangs of Times.” Patai tells us that “the pangs of the Messianic times are imagined as having heavenly as well as earthly sources and expressions. . . . Things will come to such a head that people will despair of Redemption. This will last seven years. And then, unexpectedly, the Messiah will come.” This Jewish idea fits exactly into the way that Jesus expresses it in the Olivet Discourse.

Next Jesus tells the disciples things they would have to go through. This is not recorded in Matthew, so we’ll read the Luke account:

Luke 21:12-19 But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you, handing you

over to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. (13) This will be a time for you to serve as witnesses. (14) Therefore be resolved not to rehearse ahead of time how to make your defense. (15) For I will give you the words along with the wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. (16) You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will have some of you put to death. (17) You will be hated by everyone because of my name. (18) Yet not a hair of your head will perish. (19) By your endurance you will gain your lives.

(also Mark 13:9-13) "Before all this" - this happens before all these things that have been described so far, before World War 1. Jesus mentions eight specific things here:

1. They will be rejected by the Jews - v. 12
2. They will be rejected by the Gentiles - v. 12
3. They will undergo persecutions, but that will give them opportunities for witnessing - v. 13
4. They will succeed in proclaiming the gospel everywhere (Mark 13:10). This was fulfilled in Romans 10:18 and Colossians 1:6,23 where Paul clearly states that by this time the gospel had been proclaimed to all creation under heaven.
5. They would not need to prepare a defense in their trials because God would put the words in their mouths - v. 14-15
6. They would be rejected by their own family members - v. 16
7. They would be hated by all men - v. 17
8. Some of them would survive - v. 18-19

These things were fulfilled in the lives of the apostles, as recorded in the book of Acts, and from other historical records. Now Jesus answers the first question:

Luke 21:20-24 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. (21) Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Those who are inside the city must depart. Those who are out in the country must not enter it, (22) because these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. (23) Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people. (24) They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led away as captives among all nations. Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

So the sign that Jerusalem was about to be destroyed was the surrounding of her by armies. I'd say that's a pretty good sign. Jesus tells them not to fight back, but to run away. In 66 A.D. Israel revolted against the rule of the Roman Empire. The Roman general Gallus came with his army and surrounded Jerusalem. So this was the sign that Jesus spoke about. Jesus had commanded that the Jewish Christians flee the city, but they were unable to because of the encirclement of the Romans. However, harassed by Jewish guerilla fighters and fearful of being cut off from his supply line, Gallus withdrew from the siege of Jerusalem and started back to Caesarea to await reinforcements. On the way back, they were attacked by Jewish forces and Gallus was killed. So now Jerusalem was no longer surrounded, and every single remaining Jewish believer left Jerusalem, crossed the Jordan river, set up their own Jewish community by the name of Pella in the Transjordan, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, and waited for the rest of Jesus' prophecy to be fulfilled. In 68 A. D. a new Roman general, Vespasian, besieged Jerusalem, and was eventually replaced by his son Titus when he was raised to be Emperor of Rome. The siege lasted for two years, at the end of which Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. Altogether, 1,100,000 Jews were killed in the final attack on Jerusalem. The interesting thing was that, as far as history tells, not a single Jewish Christian lost their

life in this siege, because they had already obeyed the words of Jesus and left the city.

From this time on Jerusalem has been trampled down by the Gentiles and will continue to be until the times of the Gentiles come to an end, which is when Christ returns. (The old city section of Jerusalem is still primarily occupied by Arabs).

The end of verse 24 (“times of the Gentiles”) is a transition period between the prophecy that refers to the past A.D. 70 event and the prophecy that looks to a future fulfillment at Christ’s second coming in the next verses. We now live in the “times of the Gentiles.” You can see the connection with Romans 11:25:

Romans 11:25 For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

Both passages speak of Israel’s redemption (Luke 21:28; Romans 11:26–27). Then Jesus goes on...

Matthew 24:9-14 "Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations because of my name. (10) Then many will be led into sin, and they will betray one another and hate one another. (11) And many false prophets will appear and deceive many, (12) and because lawlessness will increase so much, the love of many will grow cold. (13) But the person who endures to the end will be saved. (14) And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

(Also Mark 13:14-23) Some scholars believe these verses are being fulfilled in a general way between the first and second comings of Christ. These verses are similar to those we’ve seen before in Luke 21, but they are different. Luke clearly says that the things described will happen before the sign of the end of the age, when nation shall rise against nation. The key word here in Matthew is the word “Then”, indicating these things will happen after the sign of the “Nation against nation”, or world war. Jesus is speaking of five events that will happen:

1. There will be an intense persecution of the saints. (also Revelation 6:9-11)
2. There will be many false prophets (also Zechariah 13:2-5)
3. There will be a tremendous rise of sin. Could this be caused by the removal of the restrainer of evil? (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8)
4. Those Jews who survive until the end of the Tribulation will be saved
5. The gospel will be preached to the whole world (Revelation 7:1-17)

Most prophecy scholars today believe these things will happen in the first half of the Tribulation. How do we know that? Because next Jesus speaks of an event that we already know from the book of Daniel will happen exactly midway through the 7 year Tribulation – the Abomination of Desolation.

This description of lawlessness is similar to Paul’s description of the “man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. This passage (Matthew 24) is building toward the abomination of desolation (24:15), which will be committed by the antichrist in the middle of the tribulation. Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2, combines the man of lawlessness with the abomination of desolation.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. (4) He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God.

What does the phrase “lawlessness will increase” in Matthew 24:12 mean in this context? Commentators agree that it means unusually rapid or exponential increase. Morris notes that “*the thought is that in the days of which Jesus is speaking lawlessness will not simply increase a little: it will be multiplied.*” This clearly fits the idea of future tribulation period where lawlessness will reach the highest levels in all of human history. We think it is bad today, cheer up, it will be even worse during this unique seven-year period of history.

The exact meaning of “the person who endures to the end, he shall be saved,” is a hotly debated passage. Some use this passage to teach a Christian doctrine known as the perseverance of the saints. Others believe that it refers to a physical deliverance, which is what I believe Jesus is saying here, because it is the only view that makes sense in this context.

First we must make sure we understand the meaning of the word “saved.” Because the word “saved” is used in the New Testament to refer to the time when one becomes a Christian, many just plug that meaning into this passage. The leading Greek lexicon says that the basic meaning of this word is “save, keep from harm, preserve, rescue.” This word can be used in relation to the doctrine of salvation (Matthew 1:21; Acts 16:31; 1 Corinthians 1:18; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philemon 1:19; Titus 3:5, etc.), or it can simply refer to physical deliverance or rescue (Matthew 8:25; 14:30; 27:49; Acts 27:31; Hebrews 5:7; Jude 5, etc.). The exact meaning is determined by its context. Words have no specific meaning apart from context. Here, ‘saved’ (sozo) means basically to ‘deliver’ or to ‘rescue’.

Many commentaries on this passage don’t pay attention to the context and start sermonizing on endurance in the Christian life. They make this into a passage that teaches the Christian doctrine of endurance, even though it is not supported by the specific text. Of course, there is a Christian doctrine of endurance taught in the Epistles (Romans 12:12; 1 Corinthians 13:7; 2 Timothy 2:10, 12; Hebrews 12:3, 7; James 1:12; 5:11; 1 Peter 2:20). This doctrine teaches that one of the many character qualities that a believer is to have is endurance. Why? Because endurance under suffering produces character (Romans 5:3-4). Yet, none of those references to the Christian doctrine of endurance speak of “enduring to the end.” Instead, passages that speak of enduring to the end all have the same context—the Tribulation (Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:19; Revelation 13:10; 14:12).

Specifically this section is referring to the Jewish remnant, who, if they endure to the end, will be physically rescued by Christ at His second coming and they will go into the millennial kingdom in their mortal bodies (Matthew 25:21, 34). Daniel 12:1, Mark 13:13, Matthew 10:22, Revelation 13:10 and 14:12 strongly support this interpretation.

So our interpretation of Matthew 24:9-14 is that these things will happen in the first half of the Tribulation. “*If our interpretation is the right one there must be perfect harmony between these three: Old Testament Prophecy: Matthew 24:4-44, and Revelation 6-11.*” says Arno Gaebelein. I believe there is harmony there, especially between the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. This is what convinces me that verses 4–14 refer to the first half of the tribulation. Gaebelein continues: “*If this is the correct interpretation, if Matthew 24:4-14 refers to the beginning of that coming end of the age and if Revelation 6 refers to the same beginning of the end and that which follows the sixth chapter leads us on into the great tribulation, then there must be a perfect harmony between that part of the Olivet discourse contained in Matthew 24 and the part of Revelation beginning with the sixth chapter. And such is indeed the case.*” You can see the parallels in the following chart.

PARALLELS BETWEEN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE AND THE SEAL JUDGMENTS OF REVELATION

	Revelation 6	Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
False Messiahs, False Prophets	2	5, 11	6	8
Wars	2-4	6-7	7	9
International Discord	3-4	7	8	10
Famines	5-8	7	8	11
Pestilences	8			11
Persecution- Martyrdom	9-11	9	9-13	12-17
Earthquakes	12	7	8	11
Cosmic Phenomena	12-14			11

As our Lord Jesus' discourse nears the mid-point of the seven-year tribulation, verse 14 raises some questions. What exactly is meant by "the gospel of the kingdom?" Is this still a future event? What does "a witness to all nations" mean? What is meant by "then the end will come?"

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

Some believe that "gospel of the kingdom" is the gospel or the message about forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ, as preached in the New Testament epistles. Others, like myself, believe that it is more of a technical term that describes the coming of Christ's kingdom, which we know as the millennium. The Greek word "gospel" simply means "good news." Good news about what? Here it would mean good news about the Kingdom.

Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost explains:

"During the time that the politico-religious system of the beast is in absolute control, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world (Matt. 24:14). The gospel of the kingdom was preached by both Jesus and John (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). This was the announcement of the good news that the kingdom was near. This message had both a soteriological and an eschatological emphasis. . . . The gospel of the kingdom as preached in Tribulation will have two emphases. On the one hand it will announce the good news that Messiah's advent is near, at which time He will introduce the messianic age of blessing. On the other hand it will also offer men salvation by grace through faith based upon the blood of Christ."

The word “kingdom” is used 51 times in Matthew. It is a major theme in Matthew’s Jewish gospel. Dr. Stan Toussaint has done an exhaustive study of how “kingdom” is used in Matthew and has concluded as follows: “Every time the term kingdom is used theologically in Matthew it refers to the same thing, the kingdom yet to come on this earth inaugurated and governed by the Messiah.” Specifically Dr. Toussaint has the following comments on Matthew 24:14:

What is this “gospel of the kingdom?” It must be the same good news as was described in 3:2; 4:17, 23; and 9:35. Entrance into the coming kingdom was based on repentance; that was and is the gospel of the kingdom. In the context, however, it would also portray the nearness of the kingdom during the Tribulation period.

FULFILLMENT TIMING

The historicist takes Matthew 24:14 as fulfillment of the Great Commission during our present church age. A. Lukyn Williams says, “So in the present age we are not to expect more than that Christian missions shall reach the uttermost parts of the earth, and that all nations shall have the offer of salvation, before the final appearance of Christ. The success of these efforts at universal evangelization is a mournful problem.” This verse is often used at missions conferences as a motivation for becoming a missionary. However, the Great Commission is sufficient, because this passage relates to evangelism during the tribulation, not for our current church age. Also, our message in this age is not the gospel of the Kingdom, but the gospel (good news) of reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 5:18-19).

I believe that this passage will be fulfilled in the future, not during the current church age, but during the tribulation. The context supports a future fulfillment, since Christ’s discourse has not yet been fulfilled.

ANGELIC EVANGELISM

I believe that Revelation 14:6-7 is a parallel passage to Matthew 24:14. Both speak of global evangelization during the seven-year tribulation, leading up to the second coming of Christ to planet earth. John MacArthur says,

“Just before the bowl judgments are poured out and the final great holocaust begins, and just before the increasingly rapid birth pains issue in the kingdom, God will supernaturally present the gospel to every person on earth. He will send an angel with “an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people,” saying, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (Rev. 14:6-7).”

Interestingly, both passages are mentioned around the middle of the tribulation. This will likely occur at that time because it is at the mid-point of the seven years that the beast will require the number—six hundred, sixty-six—on either the right hand or forehead of every human being in order to buy or sell (Revelation 13:16-18). So, it is important to know that the gospel will be preached to every individual and everyone will be given a last chance to trust Christ before they take the mark. Also, the angel announces to every person in the world that there are consequences to taking the mark of the beast.

It appears that the tribulation period will be the greatest time of evangelization the world will ever see. There will be normal evangelism, like that which we have today. Then there will be the evangelism of the 144,000 Jewish witnesses (Revelation 7:3-10; 14:1-5), the two witnesses (Revelation 11:3-13), and the angelic evangelism we just mentioned. David Cooper explains:

“The purpose of preaching the gospel during the Great Tribulation is twofold: first, to give all honest-hearted truth-seekers an opportunity of accepting the Lord Jesus Christ and salvation through Him;

secondly, to prepare for judgment those who will not receive a love of the truth in order that God might be just in bringing upon them the terrific plagues foretold in Revelation.”

THEN THE END SHALL COME

Earlier Jesus said, “for these things must take place, but that is not yet the end” (verse 6). Now He says, that after the successful preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to the entire planet, “then the end shall come.” The preaching of the 144,000 witnesses is very effective, and the entire remnant of Israel turns to Christ. That conversion means the end has come. The end spoken of here is not the end of the end. It means the end of the age of the tribulation through the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:27-31). The final end will occur one thousand years later as the millennial kingdom of Christ comes to its end.

Matthew 24:15-20 *"So when you see the abomination of desolation — spoken about by Daniel the prophet — standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), (16) then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. (17) The one on the roof must not come down to take anything out of his house, (18) and the one in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. (19) Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days! (20) Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.*

Remember the Abomination of Desolation? Well, we studied it in Daniel, and Paul mentioned it here.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 *Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. (4) He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God.*

The Abomination of Desolation actually has two stages. The first stage is when the antichrist enters the temple, sits down in the Holy of Holies, and declares himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-10). The second stage will be when the false prophet will make an image of the antichrist and place it in the Holy of Holies (Revelation 13:11-15, Daniel 12:11). This is the sign of the beginning of the 2nd half of the Tribulation, and a signal to the Jews living at that time to flee from Jerusalem (also Revelation 12).

Here are the descriptions of the abomination of desolation in the Bible, which the reader is to understand:

1. It takes place in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (Daniel 11:31; 2 Thessalonians 2:4).
2. It involves a person setting up a statue in place of the regular sacrifice in the holy of holies (Daniel 11:31; 12:11; Revelation 13:14-14).
3. This results in the ending of the regular sacrifice (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11).
4. There will be a time of about three-and-a-half years between this event and another event and the end of the time period (Daniel 9:27; 12:11).
5. It involves an individual setting up a statue or image of himself so that he may be worshipped in place of God (Daniel 11:31; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:14-15).
6. The image is made to come to life (Revelation 13:14).
7. A worship system of this false god is begun (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:14-15).
8. At the end of this time period the individual who does this will himself be cut off (Daniel 9:27).

Notice Christ's stressing the urgency and quickness of their escape, and He instructs us to actually pray that it doesn't happen in the winter or on Saturday. Well, it rarely ever snows in Israel, so why is this a big deal? Well, Israel receives all their rain in the winter months. Much like Southern California in the U.S., they usually don't get a drop of rain from April to October. So when it does rain in the winter months, it often causes flooding. In the U.S, we build bridges over watercourses whether they are dry or have water running in them. When I lived in California I was amazed at all the roads that had bridges over these wide

dry rivers. Well, I found out they're dry in the summer, but they have water in the winter months. But in Israel they don't always build bridges over these wadis, they just build the roads right through the watercourse. That works fine most of the year, but when they get heavy rains during the winter, often these wadis serve as channels for flash floods coming down from the mountains, and they wash out the roads. So, Jesus knows that people will need to use these roads to escape, and that is why He is saying pray it doesn't happen in winter.

Why not on Saturday? Because on Saturday (the Sabbath) in Israel there is no public transportation – no buses or trains run. So, if this event happens on Saturday, it will be more difficult to get out of the city. Only one third of the population of Israel own a car, most depend on public transportation. The parallel passage of Revelation 12 has more details of this mid-tribulational escape.

Revelation 12:6 and she fled into the wilderness where a place had been prepared for her by God, so she could be taken care of for 1,260 days.

The key phrase in this verse is “taken care of.” This explains why the Jewish Remnant is told to flee without taking any provisions, because God has prepared a place where Israel will be taken care of for three and a half years (the second-half of the tribulation). Notice some of the Old Testament passages that describe God's provision for His people during this three and a half year period:

Isaiah 41:17-20 The oppressed and the poor look for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched from thirst. I, the LORD, will respond to their prayers; I, the God of Israel, will not abandon them. (18) I will make streams flow down the slopes and produce springs in the middle of the valleys. I will turn the desert into a pool of water and the arid land into springs. (19) I will make cedars, acacias, myrtles, and olive trees grow in the wilderness; I will make evergreens, firs, and cypresses grow together in the desert. (20) I will do this so people will observe and recognize, so they will pay attention and understand that the LORD's power has accomplished this, and that the Holy One of Israel has brought it into being."

Micah 2:12 I will certainly gather all of you, O Jacob, I will certainly assemble those Israelites who remain. I will bring them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in the middle of a pasture; they will be so numerous that they will make a lot of noise.

Revelation 12:12-13 Therefore you heavens rejoice, and all who reside in them! But woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has come down to you! He is filled with terrible anger, for he knows that he only has a little time!" (13) Now when the dragon realized that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

These are all verses which are believed to be describing the flight of the Jews and God's provision for them. Then Jesus tells us why the Jews are to “head for the hills” when they see the Abomination of Desolation.

Matthew 24:21-25 For then there will be great suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen. (22) And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. (23) Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe him. (24) For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (25) Remember, I have told you ahead of time.

“Great suffering” is translated “Great Tribulation” in most versions. This is the second half of the Tribulation, that Jesus is describing here. To quickly review some other verses about this time and the purpose for it:

Deuteronomy 4:30 "When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice.

Jeremiah 30:7 Alas, what a terrible time of trouble it is! There has never been any like it. It is a time of trouble for the descendants of Jacob, but some of them will be rescued out of it.

Daniel 12:1 "At that time Michael, the great prince who watches over your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress unlike any other from the nation's beginning up to that time. But at that time your own people, all those whose names are found written in the book, will escape.

Paul writes about Israel's deliverance from tribulation in Romans 9–11. Romans 10:11-15 tells us that one day Israel will call upon the name of the Lord and be saved. This redemption will occur one day to national Israel, but it will come during the tribulation period—the great tribulation.

John MacArthur says, "No time or event in the history of Israel fits the description of the holocaust Jesus is here speaking of. The horrifying time is further described in some detail in Revelation 6–16, where the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments exhibit the escalating intensity of God's wrath upon sinful, rebellious mankind. Both the books of Revelation and of Daniel make clear that the Antichrist will tyrannize the world for "a time, times, and half a time" (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14), that is, a year, two years, and a half year, or three and one half years (Rev. 11:2; 13:5). Clearly, the events described by our Lord, by Daniel, and by John must refer to the same great holocaust at the end time, just before the millennial kingdom is established on earth."

"Those days will be cut short" - Dr. Renald Showers explains as follows: "Jesus was teaching that God in the past had already shortened the Great Tribulation. He did so in the sense that in the past He determined to cut it off at a specific time rather than let it continue indefinitely. In His omniscience, God knew that if the Great Tribulation were to continue indefinitely, all flesh would perish from the earth. To prevent that from happening, in the past God sovereignly set a specific time for the Great Tribulation to end."

WHO ARE THE ELECT?

The term "the elect" is used three times by Jesus in the Olivet discourse (Matthew 14:22, 24, 31; also in Mark 13:20, 22, 27). I believe that all three uses must refer to the same group. They clearly refer, in context, to some group of believers during the tribulation. Since the church has been raptured by this point, it cannot refer to her. So, are "the elect" saved Jews and Gentiles, or only the Jewish remnant? I believe that this term refers to the Jewish remnant, mostly because that is the context of the passage.

The term "the elect" is used in a variety of ways in the New Testament, so you have to look at the context to determine its meaning. Daniel identifies this time as 'decreed for your people and your holy city,' indicating that Israel, not the church or mankind in general, will be the center of the Tribulation suffering.

William Kelly says, "the evidence unmistakably points to a converted body of Jews in the latter day, not standing in church light and privilege, but having Jewish hopes, and while awaiting the Messiah." The term "the elect" is most likely used because Christ looks forward to those belonging to the Jewish remnant, though not yet saved, they are chosen to such a destiny—the elect."

FALSE CHRISTS AND FALSE PROPHETS

Verse 23 could mean that the antichrist (the Beast in Revelation) attempts to entice the elect, Jewish remnant out of their wilderness hiding by saying that the Messiah is in Jerusalem, and, they should come and see Him. But, Jesus has warned his disciples in advance not listen to that deception. This passage is parallel to Paul's writings in 2 Thessalonians 2 and John's words in Revelation 13. Both passages speak of Antichrist's deceptions. While Matthew 24:26 says that the elect will not be deceived, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 says that the non-elect will be deceived.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 The arrival of the lawless one will be by Satan's working with all kinds of miracles and signs and false wonders, (10) and with every kind of evil deception directed against those who are perishing, because they found no place in their hearts for the truth so as to be saved. (11) Consequently God sends on them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false. (12) And so all of them who have not believed the truth but have delighted in evil will be condemned.

Arno Gaebelein says: "*But also the apostate part of Christendom, left behind after the rapture of the church has taken place, will be deceived and swept away in the great judgments of that coming day.*" Jesus says concerning these false signs and wonders: "*Do not believe!*" **This is a powerful message to us today that a Believer should not just believe anything that comes down the pike, but it does matter what you believe.**

FALSE SIGNS AND WONDERS

Here we have the same words (great signs and wonders) that are used to describe the miracles of Christ and His apostles, but, these works are performed by false prophets and false Messiahs. Does this mean that Satan is merely deceiving people into thinking that they see a genuine miracle? Or, is this speaking of genuine miracles? I think these are real miracles, because every time these false miracles are mentioned, the language used is that they actually do these things, as we have in this passage "will show great signs and wonders." Nowhere does the language give the impression they were just tricking people into thinking that they were doing miracles with smoke and mirrors, it seems like scripture would have used language that made that clear.

Examples are in Revelation 13:13-15. These are the words of actual events, not sleight of hand. It appears that God grants temporary power to these false prophets and Messiahs so that they will be used of God to attract all unbelievers to themselves in unbelief. This is what is meant in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 above. Paul tells us the reason is that "God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that those who have delighted in evil will be condemned." But His elect will not be deceived, because Jesus has warned them in advance to watch out for these false miracles.

Next time we'll pick up from here and finish the Olivet Discourse.