

The End Times According to Jesus Part 1

By Jack Kelley



The Olivet Discourse is the name scholars have given a private prophecy briefing Jesus gave to Peter, James, John and Andrew on the Mount of Olives. It's recorded in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13-14, and Luke 21.

John, while present at the briefing, did not include it in his gospel. John preferred to focus on the time Jesus spent with His disciples in the Upper Room on the night He was betrayed.

In reviewing the Olivet Discourse, we'll rely mainly on Matthew's account, it being the most detailed, adding excerpts from Mark and Luke where they add to or clarify the message. And we'll try to stay as close to the Lord's own words as possible to avoid reading any false conclusions into the passage.

As Matt. 24 opens, Jesus had left the Temple area and was headed for Bethany, where He and the disciples were staying at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. It was two days before the crucifixion.

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt 24:1-3)

Based on His prediction that the Temple would soon be destroyed, the four disciples had three questions for the Lord.

- 1. When will this (Temple destruction) happen?**
- 2. What will be the sign of your (2nd) coming?**
- 3. What will be the sign of the coming of the End of the Age?**

Before we go on, their mindset in asking these questions is critical to our understanding.

While the Jews were in Babylon during the 70-year captivity, the angel Gabriel had told Daniel that Israel would be given 490 years from the date they received authorization to rebuild Jerusalem to wrap everything up. (Daniel

9:24-27) 483 of those years had passed. The Temple had been under construction for nearly 40 years and wasn't finished yet.

The disciples thought they were nearing the end of the age, and now Jesus tells them that everything will be torn down. There had never been any talk of a Church Age or a Rapture or of the disciples evangelizing the world. We know about all these things from hindsight, but they were probably in a state of great distress when they came to Him.

Even after the Resurrection they still didn't understand. This is confirmed by the question they asked Jesus on the Mount of Olives after the resurrection. "Lord, are you now going to restore the Kingdom?" (Acts 1:6)

It wasn't clear until James explained it 20 years later at the Council of Jerusalem. (Acts 15:13-18). He said the Lord was first going to take from among the Gentiles a people for Himself (the Church). After that He would turn again to Israel.

Back to our study.

In the Matthew account, the Lord ignored the first question and went straight to question 2. So for His answer to question 1, we'll go to Luke 21 where it's contained. Having begun like Matthew with an account of the End Times in verses 10-12, Luke backtracks to their first question in verses 12-24.

"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm, you will gain life." (Luke 21:12-19)

Having told them what the rest of their lives would be like, and that their eternal destiny with Him was assured, the Lord finally answered their question about the Temple destruction.

"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:20-24)

In what appears to be poor advice, He told them to get out of town when they saw the city being surrounded by enemy troops, an event that took place nearly 40 years later. The objective of a besieging army was to trap everyone inside so the plight of starving women and children would have a discouraging influence on the leadership.

Non-combatants were not allowed free passage through enemy lines for this reason.

But a strange thing happened in the siege of Jerusalem. After surrounding the city, the Roman army was suddenly told to abandon their position and prepare for an immediate departure to Rome. General Titus, who commanded the army, was the son of Vespasian, a man striving to become the Roman Emperor. Fearing he would need extra help in consolidating his power, Vespasian ordered Titus to bring the army home to assist. But before they could depart, another message arrived saying that all was in order and to resume the siege of Jerusalem.

For one week the siege lines had been abandoned. And during this time, Christians who heeded the Lord's earlier warning escaped. Although 1.2 million Jews died in Rome's defeat of Israel, according to the historian Josephus, not one Christian perished in the siege of Jerusalem. The Lord's advice had been sound and even strategically clever.

Roman soldiers were paid from the valuables they confiscated in battle, and the Temple was a huge prize. Titus wanted to preserve it, which would have deprived the soldiers of a tremendous bonus. Defending the Temple entrance with his sword raised against his own troops, he watched helplessly as a flaming torch was thrown over his head into the Temple starting a fire.

The ensuing blaze generated such heat that the gold plating covering the wooden plank ceiling began to melt and run down the stone walls, seeping into the cracks between the stones. When the blaze was finally extinguished, the soldiers dismantled the ruined walls to get the gold. By the time they had finished, not one stone was left standing on another, graphically fulfilling the Lord's prophecy to His disciples.

The Lord's prophecy concerning the duration of Jerusalem's captivity bears another look as well. Jerusalem either ceased to exist or was under Gentile authority from Roman times until June of 1967, when for the first time the Star of David flew over a unified city. This marked the end of Gentile Dominion, and a return to Israel as the focus of Biblical Prophecy, a clear sign that we're fast approaching the End of the Age.

Now, let's go back to Matthew 24 for the Lord's answers to their other questions, picking up the narrative in verse 4.

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. (Matt 24:4-9)

The coming Church Age would be characterized by the appearance of false messiahs, conflict between nations, natural disasters, and famine. Luke adds pestilence and great signs from heaven to the mix (Luke 21:11), as does the King James Version of Matthew. The comparison to birth pains reveals that while these events would occur all through the Church Age, they would be more and more frequent and more intense as the end comes nearer.

Next time we'll look at the clear signs marking the beginning and duration of the Great Tribulation. Until then, if you listen carefully, you can almost hear the Footsteps of the Messiah.

Jack Kelley