

MATTHEW 24 – THE OLIVET PROPHECIES



After Jesus finished His woes against the Jewish leadership, He left the Temple area and climbed up with His disciples to the Mount of Olives. From there they had a breathtaking view of the Temple complex. Since He gave important prophecies on the Mount of Olives, it is called "The Olivet Prophecy" and it spans Matthew 24 and 25.

Matthew 24:1-2 says, "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'"

There is a duality here: This prophecy would be partially fulfilled forty years later in A.D. 70., but the final fulfillment will be in the end times, when Jerusalem is surrounded and the Abomination of Desolation is set up (Mt. 24:15).

Why was every stone removed of the Temple area? *The Believer's Bible Commentary* explains, "[The Roman general] Titus tried unsuccessfully to save the temple, but his soldiers put it to the torch, thus fulfilling Christ's prophecy. When the fire melted the gold trim, the molten metal ran down between the stones. To get at it, the soldiers had to remove the stones one by one, just as our Lord predicted. This judgment was executed in A.D. 70 when the Romans under Titus sacked Jerusalem."

His disciples were shocked at what Jesus had just said and wanted to know when this would happen: "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'"

Jesus then gives them an outline of the prophecies, some for their time; others for the end time. This outline has **seven** parts, and they parallel the seven parts given in Revelation 6-8.

1. False prophets (Mt. 24:4-5, 25; Rev. 6:1-2)
2. World Wars (Mt. 24:6-7; Rev. 6:3-4)
3. Global Famines (Mt. 24:7; Rev. 6:5-6)
4. Widespread plagues (Mt. 24:8; Rev. 6:7-8)
5. Great Tribulation (Mt. 24:9-28; Rev. 6:9-11)
6. Heavenly Signs (Mt. 24:29-30; Rev. 6:12-17)
7. Trumpets (Mt. 24:31; Rev. 8:1-9, 21)

Are we in the end times? On the one hand, much has been fulfilled that is mentioned here, but on the other, there is still quite a bit left. We see in the past century that the first four signs have been partially fulfilled, but they are only setting the table for what is ultimately coming.

Notice after giving the first four signs, Christ said, "See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, *but the end is not yet*...All these are the *beginnings* of sorrow [birth pangs]" (Mt. 24:6-8). Thus, these first four signs will *intensify* as the end time approaches—which is the final 3 ½ year period before Christ returns.

First, *false prophets* will multiply until they lead to the *ultimate* false prophet – the Antichrist. This man, called the false prophet in Revelation 16:13, will team up with a political-military leader in Europe to initiate the Great Tribulation period.

Secondly, the *wars* in the world will intensify until they lead to the *final* world war – the start of World War III. The weapons will be so powerful they will devastate much of the earth (Rev. 8-9). 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 days will be shortened" (Mt. 24:21-22).

Thirdly, *famines* will increase in the world, with overpopulation, deforestation and an unstable climate contributing to more droughts.

Four, widespread disease epidemics, some caused by rampant immorality leading to venereal diseases (AIDS, etc.) and others by super-resistant viruses spreading by worldwide transportation.

Christ then admonishes members living at that time to be spiritually zealous and stay involved in doing God's Work. He warned, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold [some members will become lukewarm]. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom *will* be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Mt. 24:21-24).

Robertson explains: "**Shall wax cold** - To breathe cool by blowing, to grow cold, 'spiritual energy blighted or chilled by a malign or poisonous

wind' (Vincent). **The love of many** – the love of the brotherhood gives way to mutual hatred and suspicion" (*Word Pictures of the N.T.*).

Fifth, the Great Tribulation period begins, which separates the Church into two groups. One flees to its place of refuge, while the other remains behind (Rev. 12:17). When the disciples ask Him *where to?* (see Luke 17:37), He answered, "For wherever the carcass [or body] is, there the eagles will be gathered together" (Mt. 24:28). He was referring to a common sight in His day—of birds gathering around a central place—where there was a dead body. He seems to refer to the Church when it will "fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Rev. 12:14).

Referring to fleeing at this time, He also mentions members around Israel will have a harder time to escape and so will pregnant women or nursing mothers. He said, "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath" (Mt. 24:19-20). By the way, this last scripture shows Christ knew there would be faithful still keeping the Sabbath (and not Sunday) when He returns!

The *key* event Jesus gives is the setting up of the Abomination Desolation, where the Temple once stood in Jerusalem. He said, "Therefore when you see the 'Abomination of Desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place' (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Mt. 24:15-16).

From Daniel, 2 Thes. 1 and Revelation, we see this is referring to the false prophet making his headquarters in Jerusalem, setting up an image that desecrates the place and establishing himself as the religious leader of most of the world.

This prophecy was partially fulfilled when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman army in A.D. 66 and the Church fled from there. Robertson mentions, "**Flee unto the mountains** -- the mountains east of the Jordan. Eusebius says that the Christians actually fled to Pella at the foot of the mountains about seventeen miles south of the Sea of Galilee. They remembered the warning of Jesus and fled for safety" (*Word Pictures of N.T.*).

During this 3 ½ year period, the two witnesses of the Church preach the gospel to a deceived and mostly indifferent world. God will attempt to wake them up with the different plagues that strike the earth, but all we see, like Noah's and Lot's days, is mostly a hardening of attitudes of a morally degenerate world that want to keep its sinful way of life. We read in Rev. 16:11, "They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and *did not* repent of their deeds."

We thus begin the **sixth stage** with the heavenly signs and trumpets sound in heaven as each punishment is loosed upon the earth. Christ says, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn [it means to beat their breasts in grief], and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Mt. 24:29-31).

The **seventh** and last stage is when Christ descends, at the final trumpet, and angels will gather "His elect" from every part of the earth, those who will be part of the first resurrection. As it says in 1 Thes. 4:16, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

After explaining the end time events, Jesus now focuses on **how a person can prepare** for His coming. He said in Mt. 24:32-36, "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place... But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

Jesus first speaks of the **watching world events** to be aware of when the end time events break on the world stage. You have to be conscious of previous preparatory events. Most of the world will not perceive their importance. He also said once it starts, it's like a countdown, or a woman in heavy labor, for there is no reversing the trend or the intensity. It will all happen to the generation that witnesses its start. Yet, He also warns not to speculate about the precise timing.

Secondly, Christ focuses on the **moral conditions** of that time: "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Mt. 24:37-44).

The Believer's Bible Commentary notes, "In those days, however, most people will be indifferent, just **as in the days of Noah**...The people ate, drank, married, gave **in marriage**; in other words, they went through the routines of life as if they were going to live forever. Though warned that a flood was coming, they lived as if they were flood-proof. When it came, they were unprepared, outside the only place of safety. That is just the way it will be when Christ returns."

Since this refers to Noah's time as a parallel, it seems when it's time to flee to the place of safety, there will be a separation between the converted and unconverted, the faithful and the lukewarm. Luke 21:34-36 sheds light on this: "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. 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 that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Thirdly, Christ finalizes chapter 24 by focusing on the **spiritual condition** of Church members: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 24:45-51).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary explains, "The coming of the Lord will be a *test of servants*. As the master in Jesus' story entrusted all his possessions to his servant, so God has entrusted the care of all things in this earth to His servants. The responses of the servants are indications of their inward conditions. The Lord wants to find His servants, like the first *steward*, faithfully carrying out His will. Such a servant will be rewarded for his faithful service when the Lord returns. But a servant who fails to carry out his stewardship will be judged severely. Such a servant, concluding that his master was not returning for a long time, took advantage of others (he beat his fellow servants) and lived wickedly (eating and drinking with drunkards). Like the wicked people of Noah's day, he was unaware of the sudden coming judgment. But the judgment will come and he will be dealt with as one would deal with a hypocrite, which is precisely what an unfaithful servant is. His separation will result in eternal judgment (weeping and gnashing of teeth) apart from his master. Likewise the judgment of the wicked at the Lord's second coming will separate them eternally from God."

Another commentary adds, "*There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* is a clause used throughout Matthew, always of remorse experienced when one has suffered great loss. Those who fail to be diligent servants of God will not share in all of God's blessings when they enter the millennial kingdom" (*Nelson's Commentary*).