

“The Olivet Discourse”

The most detailed teaching from Jesus concerning end times.

9.30a.m. Sunday 15 October, 2017

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the Laidley Baptist Church (Qld).*

Introduction

Well, it's only 2 sleeps to go and we're on the plane to Israel. Thanks to those who have given us donations to take to the IDF & other places in Israel. Please continue to pray for us as we travel. We head to Israel for nearly 3 weeks culminating in the Centenary celebrations of the Australian Light Horse charge in Beer Sheva on 31 October. Then we head to Jordan for about 5 days to visit the Capital, Amman & spend 2 days inside the hidden rose city of Petra. We return via Hong Kong & will return midnight 11 November

I've been talking about Israel and her place in the past present and future over the past little while. Today, I want to look at the last thing that Jesus said about the things to come (or end times) as a Prophet. It is contained in three of the Gospels - Matthew 24-25, Mark 13 & Luke 21 - and it's commonly known as the Olivet Discourse.

I'm not sure if you have ever heard of it, but it certainly is interesting teaching in the Scriptures. It contains the most detailed teaching by Jesus of things concerning the future/end times. It answers questions asked by His disciples about the Kingdom to come.

But first let's pray ...

Gracious Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your Word today, for your Son Jesus, who as Prophet & Priest will return soon as King and Messiah. May we be found watching unto salvation & labouring for the Lord. Teach us today more about your agenda and your love for us as we open your Word of Truth. In the mighty name of our High Priest Jesus. Amen.

The Olivet Discourse – between 2 major events:

The famous Olivet Discourse occurs between two significant events.

Immediately preceding it, Jesus speaks his final words of His public ministry (Matthew 23:1-39).

Immediately after it, came the preparation for the Passover – the first Lord’s Supper – the events just before Jesus’ death.

Before it, Jesus’s public ministry as a prophet came to an end, and for the remainder of his last days on earth, He deals exclusively with His disciples. In the latter part of Matthew 23 (v37-39), Jesus talks about the preconditions of His Second Coming – i.e. He wont return until the Jewish leaders ask Him to return. Once, in the past, they rejected his messiahship, but a day must come when the Jewish leaders will accept his Messiahship.

Immediately after the Olivet Discourse, we have the Upper Room and the last Passover (or first Lord’s Supper). It is where Jesus transitions in his ministry from prophet to Priest.

In between these 2 significant events is the famous Olivet Discourse. It is recorded by three of the Gospel writers, as I mentioned earlier.

BASIC PURPOSE

The basic purpose of the Olivet Discourse is to answer the question:

When & how would the Messianic kingdom come into being?

Since Israel had rejected the messiahship of Jesus, it was impossible to set up the Kingdom at that time. It would need to be set up at a later time. In light of Matthew 23 and Jesus’ closing words in v37-39 He will not return until Israel requests it.



So, what will be the circumstances that will cause this to happen? and When, then, will the Kingdom be set up?

The Olivet Discourse answers this question. You've got to look at all 3 Gospels to get the bigger picture. Each one is a piece to the jigsaw puzzle. Each Gospel records it's piece according to the theme of it's Gospel. But when you study all 3 chronologically, you get the total picture of what Jesus said in his final days as a prophet.

The Historical Setting

After Jesus scathing attack on the Pharisees, and announcing the coming destruction of the Temple, Jesus & his disciples leave the Temple compound for the last time during his lifetime. The Temple compound was not quite finished at that time. They were not finished until A.D. 64 – just 6 years before they were destroyed totally. But at this time, the building/Temple compound had been going on for around 50 years. The disciples commented about the magnificent stones – huge some of them weighing several tons.

But Jesus mentions that this Temple was doomed, having not one stone left upon another, that it would be thrown down. This prophecy of Jesus' was literally fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and the Temple set on fire. Because there was so much gold in the building, a great deal of it melted with the liquid seeping down between the crevices of the Temple stones. When it cooled down the Romans systematically removed everything stone by stone to get to the gold.

This prophecy by Jesus had left the disciples perplexed at the time. So, when they arrive at the Mount of Olives (that's where we get the name the Olivet Discourse) four of the disciples raise 3 questions, which at the same time included requests for 3 signs.

Matthew 24:3 / Luke 21:7 – *And as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world?'*

Question 1 – Tell us when shall these things be? (These things = the destruction of the Temple)

In other words, when will Jerusalem and the Temple be destroyed and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?

Question 2 – What shall be the sign of your coming? We're not talking here about the Rapture of the Church which was imminent, and would happen without warning or

preceding sign. However, the Second Coming will be preceded by a sign. The disciples wanted to know what that sign would be?

Question 3 – What shall be the sign of the end of the world? (world = Greek for age). They ask for a third sign - What will be the sign of the end of the ages? The Rabbis of the day spoke of 2 ages – this age, or the age in which we now live, and the age to come, the Messianic age.

So the disciples real question is What is the sign that the last days of this age have begun and that will lead to the Messianic age?

So we have three questions that the disciples ask for three signs to watch for. Jesus answers these 3 questions, but not in the order in which they were asked.

He answers the third question first; then the first question, and then the second question last. The 3 Gospels answer them in totality with Luke's Gospel answering the first question, and Matthew & Mark's account recording the answer to the first question.

Jesus answers the 3rd Question

Just before Jesus answers the third question he begins by negatively providing some general characteristics of the Church Age (which are not signs).

Read Matthew 24:4-6 / Mark 13:6-7 / Luke 21:8-9

None of these things meant that the end has begun. He wanted to make sure that his disciples didn't jump to any conclusions because of certain events, so he answers the question negatively, telling them of things that would NOT mean that the end has begun. There were to be 2 general characteristics of the Church Age:

1. The Rise of False Messiahs (there would be many)
2. The existence of local wars (wars & rumours of wars – NOT a sign of the end)

So the conclusion is that 'all these things must needs to come to pass, but the end is not yet' (Matthew 24:6). These 2 things will come first, but neither of these things would be a sign that the end has begun.

After answering the 3rd question negatively, now Jesus will answer it positively, giving one sign that the end of the age had truly begun.

Matthew 24:7-8 – *For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are the beginning of travail.*

All three Gospel writers mention the sign of the end of the age is nation rising against nation coupled with earthquakes and famine in various places. These will be the birth pangs. Signs of the start of the new Messianic age. Nation against nation = a world war, not just local wars in the Middle East.

A worldwide war will signal the coming of the Messiah Jesus. It will signal the end of the age has begun. The first World Wars I & II led to the re-establishment of the Jewish State. Since World War I, history has entered the last days of the Church Age. The thing to note is that the last days are an extended period of time. The sign that the end of the age has begun is the world-wide conflict fulfilled by World Wars I & II.

Jesus has provided an answer to the 3rd question regarding the sign of the end of the age. Now he wants to turn his attention to what the Apostles will have to undergo.

Read Luke 21:12-19

These events are going to occur before the sign that the end of the age has begun (hence the phrase, *'before all these things'*). So, before the nation rising against nation and earthquakes/famine sign, the Apostles themselves will undergo certain experiences after He departed from them. He lists 9 things:

- They will be rejected by the Jews (v12a)
- They will be rejected by the Gentiles (v12b)
- They will undergo persecution, leading to testimony (v13)
- They will succeed in proclaiming the Gospel everywhere (Mark 13:10, Rom 10:18)
- They need not worry preparing defences before their trials, as they will be given divine utterance when they are brought before judgement (vv14-15)
- They will be rejected by their own family members (v16)
- They will be hated by all men to the point that they will be martyred (v17)
- NEVERTHELESS, their salvation is assured (v18)
- They will succeed in winning many souls (v19)

We can read all of these things in the Book of Acts and other historical writings that trace the Apostles' activities. So after answering the third question, Jesus mentions some of the personal experiences that they would have to undergo BEFORE the end of the age would come. They were not to expect the end of the age to come soon. Many would be martyred before the end of the age begins.

Jesus answers the 1st Question

Jesus then goes on to answer their first question concerning the sign of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Read Luke 21:20-24

The sign would be that the City of Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies. The Jewish believers were told that when they saw this sign, they were to leave the city of Jerusalem and Judea and flee outside the land. This sign would mark the coming desolation of Jerusalem – *it would be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*. History tells us this began as a Jewish revolt against the Romans in A.D. 66. This involved Cestus Gallus and Vespasian and his son, Titus who besieged the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 destroying everything. All together, 1,100,000 Jews were killed in the final onslaught.

Jerusalem, to this present day, will not be free of Gentile nations treading down upon her until the Messiah returns.

That leaves one more question to answer ...

Jesus answers the 2nd Question

In preparation for answering the 2nd question Jesus turns to the Great Tribulation itself. He speaks of events of both the first & second halves of the Tribulation.

The events of the first half of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:9-14)

Five things will happen in the first half of the Tribulation:

- There will be tremendous persecution of the saints (v9-10 & also Revelation 6:9-11). The one world religious system will be doing the persecution & will be responsible for the death of the saints in the first half of the Tribulation (Rev. 17:1-6).
- The first half of the Tribulation will be characterized by the rise of many false prophets (v11 & Zechariah 13:2-6)
- A tremendous rise of sin (v12) because evil will no longer be restrained (II Thess. 2:6-7)
- Those Jews who survive to the end of the Tribulation will be saved (v13)
- The world-wide preaching of the Gospel (v14) which is conducted by the 144,000 Jews of Revelation 7:1-8.

The events of the second half of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:15-28; Mark 13:14-23)

Jesus specifically mentions 8 things:

- The specific event that marks the beginning of the 2nd half of the Tribulation – the Abomination of Desolation standing in the holy place (v15). This involves 2 stages. (1) When the Anti-Christ will take over the Jewish Temple, sit down in the Holy of Holies & declare himself to be god (II Thess. 2:3-10). (2) The False Prophet will make an image of the Anti-Christ and stand it up in the Holy of Holies (Rev. 13:11-15; Daniel 12:11). This act will signal that the 2nd half and worse half of the Tribulation has begun.
- This will be the signal for Jews to flee out of the land (vv16-20). There is a sense of urgency emphasizing speed and quickness (3 difficulties – women who are pregnant or have infants; winter conditions/rainy season; Sabbath, a day when all public transport is down)
- World-wide anti-Semitism will break out in all of its fierceness (v21). Satan's attempt to annihilate the Jews once and for all will begin in earnest.
- Israel will survive this terrible period, although greatly reduced in number (v22)
- False Messiah will rise, a counterfeit son – aka the AntiChrist (v23)
- Characterized by many false signs, miracles and wonders for the purpose of worldwide deception. They will be performed by both the AntiChrist (II Thess 2:8-10) & the False Prophet (Rev. 13:11-15)
- There will be people saying that the Messiah has returned here or there & that the Second Coming has secretly occurred (vv25-27). Jesus warns the Jews not to believe any such rumour and come out of hiding. Unlike His first Coming, His Second Coming will not be in secret. All men will see it, for it will be like a flash of lightning surrounding the world.
- The Messiah hints as to the place of His Second Coming in verse 28. Where the body (Israel) is there will the vultures (Gentile nations) be gathered together. The exact place is Bozrah (Hebrew name) or Petra (Greek name). This is where the body will be (Micah 2:12-13). That is where the vultures will gather (Isa. 34:1-7; 63:1-6) and that will be the place of the Second Coming (Hab. 3:3).

So the 2nd half of the Tribulation will be a very difficult period for Israel which will culminate in the 2nd Coming of the Messiah.

But Jesus now answers the 2nd question concerning the sign that will signal the Messiah's second coming.

The Sign of the Second Coming

Read Matthew 24:29-30 / Mark 13:24-26 / Luke 21:25-27

Preceding the Second Coming, there will be a total blackout of the earth – no light penetrating from the sun, moon or stars (Matt 24:29). The sign of the Son of man will appear (v30). This sign is coupled with God's Shekinah glory light that will signal the Second Coming of the Messiah.

The answer to the 2nd question – What will be the sign of the Second Coming? – is the Shekinah Glory. A sudden, glorious, tremendous light that will disperse the darkness. This will be the sign and following this the Messiah Himself will return (v30b).

The Messiah has now answered all 3 questions:

- The sign of the destruction of the Jewish Temple was to be the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies.
- The sign that the end of the world (age) has begun was to be a world war.
- The sign of the Second Coming would be the Shekinah glory breaking through world-wide blackout.

But although Jesus has answered all three questions, He still wishes to give more information regarding the last days.

(1) The re-gathering of Israel (Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27) – this will occur after His Second Coming. He will send his angels all over the world to regather every Jew and bring them back to the Land (background is Isaiah 27:12-13). The final world-wide restoration will come only after the Second Coming and not before.

(2) An exhortation to look up when these things begin to come to pass. This will mark the imminent redemption of believers from this world. Notice Jesus doesn't say when ALL these things come to pass, then look up, your redemption draws nigh. He did not say that we must wait until the end of the Tribulation before looking up. Once the beginning had occurred, the Rapture became imminent (doesn't mean soon, just that it can happen at any moment).

(3) Parable of the Fig Tree (Matt 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-32; Luke 21:29-33)

Often misused to predict the date of the Second Coming of the Messiah. All sorts of predictions are made based on the fig tree being Israel and certain dates. Date setting is clearly forbidden by the Scriptures. It is merely an illustration, not as a symbol for Israel.

The blossoming (spring) is an indication that summer is on the way. Jesus is saying that when these events occur, they can know that His return is near.

(4) The Rapture of the Church (Matt 24:36-42; Luke 21:34-36)

The timing cannot be known in advance. Many regard this passage as speaking of the Second Coming rather than the Rapture. He mentions 4 things:

- Only known by one person, that is God the Father. If it is hidden from the Angels and the humanity of Jesus, how much more is it hidden from mankind. The only clue is that it will occur before the Tribulation and not necessarily just before it. It might easily be 20 years before it. The Second Coming however is a dateable event occurring exactly 7 years after he signing of the 7 year peace covenant and 3 ½ years (1260 days) after the Abomination of Desolation.
- There will be no signs preceding the Rapture (v37-39) ... compared to many signs preceding the Second Coming. It will just be normal conditions on the earth, like in Noah's days. It will occur suddenly, sweeping away all believers (v40-41). This is not true of the Second Coming. Conditions on the earth will be far from normal.
- When it comes, it will mean a separation (vv40-42) of the believer from the unbeliever.
- There is a command to watch (Luke 21:34-36) for the purposes of escaping the Tribulation. Watch = 'be ready'. Readiness is equivalent to salvation. The means to escape the Tribulation is by means of salvation. Only those who accept the Messiah before the Rapture of the Church can be ready and watching.

The result of the Rapture is that we will stand before the Son of Man. This is the only way we can escape all these things.

Watch, be ready and labour

Jesus then uses many Parables urging watchfulness, readiness and Labouring

- The Parable of the Porter (Mark 13:33-37)
- The Parable of the Master of the House (Matt 24:43-44)
- The Parable of the Faithful Servant & the Evil Servant (Matthew 24:45-51)
- The Parable of the 10 Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)
- The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

The Judgement of the Gentiles

The Olivet Discourse comes to an end with the Judgment of the Gentiles (Matthew 25:31-46 – The Sheep & the Goats)

The time of judgment will be after the Second Coming of the Messiah when the throne of David will be set up (v31).

According to Joel 3:1-3 it will occur in a place just outside the city of Jerusalem – the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is between the City and the Mount of Olives.

The subject of the judgment are individuals (v32-33). All the Gentiles who survive the Tribulation & the campaigns of Armageddon will be gathered in the Valley of Jehoshaphat and will then be separated by the Messiah – some are brought to His left side (called the goat Gentiles) and some are brought to his right side (the sheep Gentiles).

The basis of this judgment is going to be anti-Semitism or pro-Semitism. These individual Gentiles will be judged on the basis of their treatment of the Messiah's brethren, namely the Jewish people during the Tribulation (v34-35).

The sheep who are the Pro-Semites are clearly stated to be the righteous ones. Their salvation is not based on their works, but these Gentiles are already believers in the Lord Jesus. They will refuse to join the policy of the Anti-Christ in his attempt to destroy the Jews. So, while the Jews undergo great persecution, these believing Gentiles will do what they can to help the Jews under these conditions. Their works toward the Messiah's brethren will prove their faith. They are the ones who will be watching, ready and labouring (according to the 5 Parables above). Because they are saved Gentiles they will be allowed to enter into the Messianic kingdom and they will be the ones who populate the Gentile nations during the Messianic Kingdom (vv34-40).

On the other hand, the Gentile goats will be the anti-Semites who, because of their unbelief in Jesus, will join the ranks of the persecutors under the AntiChrist's authority. They will show their lack of faith by their works. They are the ones who will not be watching, ready or labouring. In violation of the five parables. For this reason they will be excluded from the Messianic Kingdom (vv41-45).

The ultimate and final result after the Kingdom is that the believing Gentiles will enter into eternal life, while the unbelieving Gentiles will enter into eternal punishment (v46).

CONCLUSION

The Olivet Discourse is the most detailed teaching that the Messiah gave concerning future things. It was his last great discourse as a prophet, because from this point on, he transitioned from prophet to priest, offering a sacrifice, his own blood, and then began to function as our High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek.

When Jesus returns to fulfil the rest of the Olivet Discourse, He will come as King.

The Olivet Discourse contains words for believers today – to watch, to be ready, & to look up for our redemption draws nigh.

It also contains words for unbelievers – to believe on the Messiah for salvation.

It also has words for those living in the Great Tribulation – for Jews to flee, and for Gentiles to watch, to be ready and to labour.

The Olivet Discourse is a difficult passage to understand. I hope and pray today that you have a better understanding of future events as taught by Jesus. May you also be watching, ready and labouring as our redemption, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns as King.

I am more than happy to talk further with you about this. Come and see me after the service, and certainly after we return from our trip to the Holy Land of Israel.

Let's pray ...

Thank you Father God for your promise of restoration and redemption through Jesus our returning King. We thank you for the blood of Jesus that saves each of us who believe upon Him and who put our faith & trust in Him, and Him alone. May you remind us by your Holy Spirit to be waiting and watching for your return and to be ever lovingly labouring for your Kingdom's sake.

May we take you and your love into this world in ways that make the Gospel real and practical this week. I pray your protection over the flock here at the Laidley Baptist Church as we travel overseas. Protect them and cover them in these weeks ahead. May they grow in grace and love as they serve you and each other. Encourage them. In the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Closing Song – Jesus, all for Jesus

