

“Eschatology”
(Part 35: The Olivet Discourse, Part 2)

V. The Olivet Discourse.

B. Warning signs that judgment is near (vv. 4-14).

1. The Olivet Discourse had to do with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD:
 - a. First, because that generation was the guilty one.
 - (i) While in the Temple, Jesus had warned the scribes and Pharisees that for their rejection of Him and the Gospel – everything that the Old Covenant pointed to – He would hold that whole generation responsible for the death of all the righteous blood shed on earth (Matt. 23:34-35).
 - (ii) Then, after pronouncing that their house would be left desolate, He left – the Lord of glory departed from the Temple – leaving their house desolate (23:38). (Note that Christ called it their house, not My Father’s house).
 - (iii) He had earlier warned that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and would be given to another nation that would produce its fruits (21:43); Jesus now goes on to describe how this would happen in chapter 24.
 - b. Second, because the Olivet Discourse is Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ questions of when the Temple would be destroyed.
 - (i) As they left the Temple, the disciples were thinking about what Jesus had said to the Jewish leaders and understood something of the implications of the desolation of the Temple and Jerusalem.
 - (ii) This was further enforced by Christ’s statement, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down” (vv. 1-2).
 - (iii) The disciples then asked when these things would be – the destruction of the Temple – and what the signs would be of His coming and of the end of the age.
 - (iv) The Olivet Discourse is His answer to these questions: the Temple would be destroyed when He came to put an end once and for all to the Old Covenant age and economy in 70 AD.
 - c. Third, because of the personal warnings.
 - (i) Throughout the chapter Jesus addresses all His warnings to the disciples – “See to it that no one misleads *you* . . . *You* will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars . . . When *you* see the abomination of desolation . . . Even so, when *you* see all these things, recognize that He is near . . . For this reason *you* be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when *you* do not think He will (vv. 4, 6, 15, 33, 44).

- (ii) If this was going to happen at some distant time in the future – some 2000 years later, as some believe, long after they were all dead – why was He speaking to them as though they would see it?
- d. Finally, because Jesus gives them a clear time boundary within which these events must take place.
 - (i) “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matt. 24:34).
 - (ii) The generation living at the time Jesus pronounced His curse upon Israel was the generation that would see and experience all these things.
 - (iii) At this point, 70 AD was about forty years away, the time of one generation.
 - e. Conclusion: Matthew 24 and parts of 25 have primarily to do with the coming of Christ in judgment in 70 AD.
 - (i) He said these things to His disciples because they were the ones who needed to be ready to escape it.
 - (ii) He also speaks of things which undoubtedly have to do with the Second Coming (*i.e.*, The Sheep and Goat Judgment): Because these two events have to do with His coming in judgment, He very naturally moves from one to the other.
2. The warning signs of His coming in judgment (vv. 4-14).
- a. Jesus now answers the disciples’ questions, beginning with the signs that His coming is near.
 - b. He said first there would be false Christs, **“See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many”** (vv. 4-5).
 - (i) There would be many who would claim to be the Messiah, perhaps come to take possession of the kingdom or to deliver the Jews from their enemies.
 - (ii) Their deception would be so powerful that many would follow them.
 - (a) Justin Martyr, one of the early apologists for the Christian faith, wrote in his *First Apology*, “After Christ’s ascension into heaven the devils put forward certain men who said that they themselves were gods” (26).
 - (b) Josephus, an early Jewish historian living at the time of Jerusalem’s fall, wrote that around this time there were many “deceivers and impostors, who under the pretence of divine inspiration foster[ed] revolutionary changes” (Wars 2.13.4).
 - (c) He also wrote about “the Egyptian false prophet” (2.13.5), who had his base of operations at the Mount of Olives” (Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 356-57).
 - (d) During the siege of Jerusalem, there were false prophets who prophesied within the city, causing the death of many during the end of the siege (Wars 6.5.2-3).

- (iii) Jesus told them His coming was near when they saw false Christs.
- c. He said second there would be wars, famines and earthquakes, **“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes”** (v. 7). These would be the beginning of the birth pains that would eventuate in the destruction of Jerusalem: **“But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs”** (v. 8).
- (i) The fact that He mentions war is especially significant since it was during the time of the *Pax Romana*, or the peace of Rome.
- (a) Origen, one of the early church fathers, tells us that there was an “abundance of peace that began at the birth of Christ” (*Romans* 1:3).
- (b) This peace was brought about, humanly speaking, by the dominion of Rome and extended throughout the whole Roman Empire, which at that time was considered the whole world. It didn’t actually end until Nero died in 68 AD.
- (c) Tacitus, a Roman historian who was about 15 years old when Rome attacked Jerusalem, wrote that in the year 68-69 AD, this peace was ruptured by the outbreak of the Jewish War and the Roman Civil Wars in what was called the violent Year of Four Emperors (Tacitus, *Histories* 1:11; quoted by Gentry 357).
- (ii) There are also accounts in the secular histories of that time of famines and earthquakes, and even plagues (a variant in the KJV).
- (a) Luke tells us of one famine prophesied by Agabus that took place sometime during the reign of Claudius (41-54 AD). This may have been the same that took place in Jerusalem after the death of Herod Agrippa I (44 AD) that Josephus writes about in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (20.2.5) that took many lives.
- (b) During the reign of Nero (54-68 AD), there was a great plague that in a single autumn killed thirty thousand people (Suetonius *Nero* 39).
- (c) Tacitus, writing about this (or possibly another plague during Nero’s reign), said, “A year of shame and of so many evil deeds, heaven also marked by storms and pestilence. Campania was devastated by a hurricane, which destroyed everywhere countryhouses, plantations and crops, and carried its fury to the neighbourhood of Rome, where a terrible plague was sweeping away all classes of human beings without any such derangement of the atmosphere as to be visibly apparent. Yet the houses were filled with lifeless forms and the streets with funerals” (*Annals* 16).
- (d) He also writes of a terrible earthquake during the reign of Tiberius (14-37 AD), “That same year twelve famous cities of Asia fell by an earthquake in the night, so that the destruction was all the more unforeseen and fearful. Nor were there the means of escape usual in, such a disaster, by rushing out into the open country, for there people

were swallowed up by the yawning earth. Vast mountains, it is said, collapsed; what had been level ground seemed to be raised aloft, and fires blazed out amid the ruin. The calamity fell most fatally on the inhabitants of Sardis, and it attracted to them the largest share of sympathy” (*Annals* 2).

- (e) During the years of Claudius and Agrippina, his wife, (around 49-54 AD), Tacitus writes, “Several prodigies [wonders] occurred in that year. Birds of evil omen perched on the Capitol; houses were thrown down by frequent shocks of earthquake, and as the panic spread, all the weak were trodden down in the hurry and confusion of the crowd. Scanty crops too, and consequent famine were regarded as a token of calamity” (*Annals* 12).
 - (f) There are many other records like these.
 - (g) Jesus said there would be wars, famines and earthquakes before His coming in judgment on Jerusalem.
- d. Third, He said it would be preceded by persecution against the church.
“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another” (vv. 9-10).
- (i) Some would be killed; all would be hated; some would fall away and betray their brother or sister.
 - (ii) The book of Acts shows us something of the persecution of the early church, covering the time frame from the ascension of Christ around 30 AD, to the time of the first Roman imprisonment of Paul at around 62 AD.
 - (iii) It shows us that though many Jews turned to Christ, many didn’t, bringing God’s wrath justly down on them (Matt. 23:33-38).
- e. Fourth, Jesus said, **“Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many” (v. 11).** Compare above vv. 4-5. This was a problem not only then, but has been throughout the history of the church.
- f. Fifth, **“And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold,” (v. 12).**
- (i) The lessening of restraint on men’s sins, brought about by God’s judgment, would cause the natural affection which people typically have for one another to grow into indifference and hatred.
 - (ii) This is true whenever God judges a nation, which is why we need to guard our own hearts against growing cold today.
- g. **“But”, sixth, “the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (v. 13).**
- (i) Jesus already made it plain that many of them would be killed in this persecution (vv. 9-10), so He’s likely not talking about saving their lives.
 - (ii) He was more likely referring to the saving of their souls: If they persevered through this persecution by holding fast to Him and His Gospel, they would arrive safely in heaven.

- (iii) The same is true for us: we must endure to the end through whatever trials, tribulations or temptations we must face, if we are finally to arrive in heaven.
 - (iv) The only way we – or they – could ever do this, is through the strength Christ supplies. We could never make it on our own.
- h. But one more thing had to happen before the end would come: **“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (v. 14).**
- (i) To the disciples (the original audience) the whole world meant the Roman Empire.
 - (a) Luke used it to refer to the extent of Caesar Augustus’ census: “that a census be taken of *all the inhabited earth*” (Luke 2:1). Clearly that census had reference only to Roman territories.
 - (b) This is also how the Jews of Thessalonica used it to accuse the Christians before the city authorities, “When they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have *upset the world* have come here also’” (Acts 17:6).
 - (ii) What Jesus meant was that the Gospel would be preached to all the nations subsumed under the Roman Empire – the place where God’s covenant people lived – to gather His elect from the Jews before He overthrew the Old Covenant Jewish system.
 - (a) Paul tells us that this was fulfilled before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. He thanked God that the Gospel had come to the believers at Colossae and was bearing fruit among them, “just as in all *the world* also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as *it has been doing* in you also since the day you heard *of it* and understood the grace of God in truth” (Col. 1:6).
 - (b) Paul himself evangelized nearly the whole Roman Empire with his companions, having gone perhaps as far as Spain in the proclamation of the Gospel.
 - i. These were the signs that the destruction of Jerusalem was near. What the sign was that it had come and what was going to happen when it came, is what we’ll see next in verses 15-28.
 - j. Jesus said these things to spare His people from being caught in God’s judgment. We also need to listen to His Word, trust in Him and persevere to the end in doing what He calls us to, so that we might be ready when He returns for us.