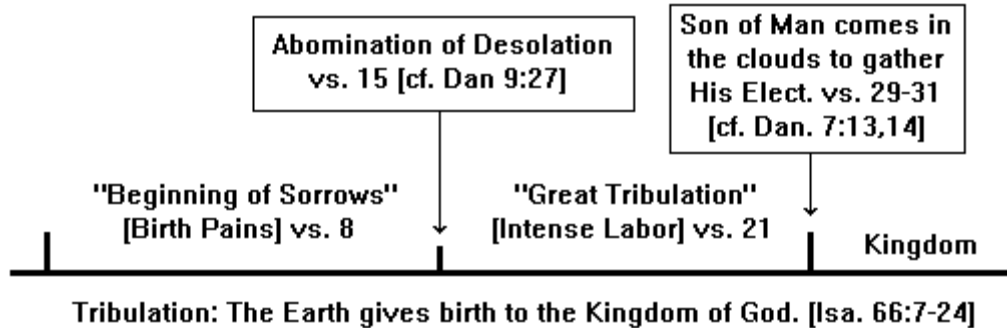


The Olivet Discourse

Matthew 24 (Mark 13)

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The Importance of the Olivet Discourse

The Olivet Discourse, contained in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, is the most straightforward and important teaching regarding the end of the age found anywhere in Scripture. It is the cornerstone of all New Testament eschatology. New Testament writers referred to this discourse repeatedly, and based their eschatology on Jesus' own teaching to His disciples about the end of the age. In successive articles, we will demonstrate the strong dependence on Jesus' Olivet Discourse by Peter, Paul, and John, when referring to the Christian's hope. This reliance on the Olivet Discourse by the Apostles to answer questions about the rapture utterly demolishes the pretribulationists' position. Jesus placed the gathering together of His elect *"immediately after the tribulation"* (Matt. 24:31), and His followers within the tribulation events. The only hope of sustaining a pretribulation rapture for the "Church" is to claim that the passage does not concern the "Church" but Israel. They have consistently claimed this very thing despite the overwhelming internal evidence to the contrary. Yet, if the Apostles repeatedly referred their Christian readers to the Olivet Discourse to answer questions about the rapture, the connection between Jesus' eschatological teaching and Church doctrine is assured, and pretribulationism is soundly defeated.

The Setting and Sequence of Events

None of the four Gospels give us a complete picture of Jesus' life, actions, or teachings. Details in one Gospel are not always found in the others. This holds true for the Olivet Discourse as well. Only by examining each account and synchronizing them together, can we reconstruct the fullest possible account of what Jesus taught.

One common mistake has been to assume that Luke 21 is another account of the Olivet Discourse. But, a careful examination of Luke 21 reveals that this discourse was

delivered on the Temple Mount earlier the same day before Jesus and His disciples went out to the Mount of Olives that evening. This is shown by the statement at the very end of the discourse: *“And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet.”* (Luke 21:37).

Luke 21 is sometimes referred to as **“The Great Temple Discourse.”** In that discourse, Jesus outlined the following future sequence covering the entire age.

- The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple
- The scattering of the Jews among the nations *“until the times of the Gentiles”* are fulfilled, and Jerusalem being trodden down by the Gentiles until the *“times of the Gentiles”* are fulfilled
- An upheaval among the nations
- Certain cosmic signs
- Jesus' return to set up His Kingdom

In The Great Temple Discourse, Jesus gave specific instructions to His disciples concerning their escape from the Roman siege of Jerusalem that came in AD70, some forty years after Pentecost. The early Church historian, Eusebius, recorded that the early Jewish Christians heeded Jesus' warnings, fled the city when they saw the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem, and were spared. It is apparent that Jesus' instructions to His disciples in Luke 21 concerned His Church, providing them with the knowledge necessary to escape from the Roman armies.

Yet, in the very same discourse, Jesus also spoke of the turmoil of the end of the age, and the cosmic signs that would announce His coming to set up His Kingdom (Luke 21:25-33). He told the very same disciples (whom He instructed to *“flee to the mountains”* when the Roman siege arrived) that they would know that the Kingdom was at hand by observing the signs in the heavens. He also told them to pray that they might be counted worthy to *“escape all these things”* (v. 36), which included both the events of AD70 and the tribulation events. By observing HOW the early Christians escaped the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, we have a good idea of what Jesus meant by escaping *“all these things”* including the tribulation. Since the same term *“escape”* is used of both their avoiding the destruction of the Roman siege and the events just prior to Jesus' return, the same kind of *“escape”* must be applied to both. Therefore, *“escape”* by fleeing to the mountains (from the Roman armies in AD70) is the same sort of *“escape”* that will spare Christians living in the last days. Also, the Greek word translated *“escape”* is in the active voice, meaning the action of *“escaping”* would be performed by Jesus' followers themselves, rather than being caught up to heaven. That would require that the verb be in the passive voice. A better translation would be to

“flee.” A accurate literal translation of Luke 21:36 would be as follows: *“Stay awake, then, in all seasons, praying, so that you may be counted worthy to flee all these things that must occur, and to stand before the Son of Man.”*

No Confusion between the Destruction of the Temple and the End of the Age

While the disciples no doubt were interested in the destruction of the Temple foretold by Jesus (and Daniel in Dan. 9:26), their real concern was His second coming and establishing His Kingdom. The disciples could not have missed the fact that these two events were clearly distinguished by Jesus, and separated by a significant period of time. Not only did He distinguish the destruction of the Temple (AD70) and the second coming in Luke 21's Great Temple Discourse earlier that day, but Matthew also recorded something Jesus said on the Temple Mount that Luke did not mention. Prior to their leaving for the Mount of Olives Jesus said this:

Matt 23:37-39

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

*38 See! **Your house is left to you desolate;***

39 for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

Here again, Jesus has clearly separated the destruction of the Temple from His second coming to set up His Kingdom. Many commentators claim that the disciples' question *"when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age"* presupposes that both would occur at the same time. But that is not the case. Jesus clearly put Israel's rejection of Him, the desolation of the Temple, and the dispersion of Israel among the nations, before His second coming.

On the Mount of Olives

On the Mount of Olives later that evening, four of the disciples privately asked Jesus specifically about the signs of His coming and the end of the age. Their interest was more than academic. They expected to live to see His coming. And, they wanted to know how they would recognize when this event was approaching. In this discourse, Jesus answered their question in the most straightforward way, outlining a sequence of events up until the end of the age and His coming in glory. He gave a series of SIGNS to watch for, including; wars, famines, earthquakes, the Gospel being preached among all nations, the abomination of desolation, and finally the darkening of the sun and moon which will announce His coming after the tribulation. Finally, His coming is described,

at which time Jesus will blow the trumpet, an dispatch His angels to “gather together His elect,” (that is to gather Jesus’ elect, those who are “in Christ”).

Matt 24:29-31

29 “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.

30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31 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.

In Mark's account of this statement it is apparent that Jesus' elect will be gathered from both earth and heaven (Mark 13:27). Now, notice verse 33;

Matt 24:33

33 So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near — at the doors!

Only after all of these signs Jesus gave were fulfilled could His disciples expect Him to come.

Dispensationalists claim that this gathering of Jesus' elect is not “the Church.” They have constructed an artificial dichotomy between “Church saints” and “tribulation saints.” However, this is a circular argument. No Scripture teaches it. You must first presuppose this alleged dichotomy from a pretribulation rapture. It cannot therefore be used as a basis for a pretribulation rapture.

Let me just suggest that you allow Jesus’ words to speak for themselves, without imposing a man made theological structure onto the text. Read this chapter, taking special note of all the places Jesus used the personal pronouns “you,” “yourselves,” etc. In doing so, it will become quite obvious that Jesus' answer to His disciples assumed that they could survive to see His coming. How can this be? Simply because Jesus Himself did not know when He would return (Mark 13:32). And, we know from several other passages that the early Christians, including Paul, expected to survive until the second coming (John 21:20-23, 1 Thess. 4:15). In fact, the entire New Testament is written with the assumption that the second coming of Jesus could (but not must) come in the first century. This fact is important in recognizing the continuity of the Olivet Discourse, and that Jesus' teaching extends throughout the present age until the second coming.

Of course, pretribulationists deny that this passage refers to the followers of Jesus (the Church). They think the disciples here represent another group, certain elect Jews in the tribulation, or “tribulation saints.” Yet, this interpretation is incompatible with the “literal” method that pretribulationists claim to champion.

The Great Commission

The Great Commission is of utmost importance in resolving the question of Jesus’ intended audience in the Great Temple Discourse and the Olivet Discourse. Jesus told His disciples:

Matt 28:19-20

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

*20 **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.*

Please bear in mind that Jesus was speaking to the very same disciples who asked Him about the signs of His coming just a few weeks earlier. They sat at His feet on Mt. Olivet while He instructed them to watch for all the signs and His coming “*immediately after the tribulation.*” In the above verses, Jesus further commanded them to take all of His private teaching to them into all the world and make converts of the Gentile nations, “*teaching them to observe ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.*” In order to obey Jesus’ command, they could not fail to instruct all new converts to also watch for the signs of Jesus’ posttribulation coming, because:

- Jesus never mentioned a pretribulation rapture before His coming in glory after the tribulation. He spoke of His followers going through the tribulation, and watching for the signs of His coming after the tribulation. This is when He will “*gather together His elect.*”
- The Gospel Jesus commanded the Apostles to preach did not include a pretribulation rapture, but instead included commands to be watching for His posttribulation coming.

The following comparison illustrates the connection between the Olivet Discourse and the Great Commission.

The Olivet Discourse

The Great Commission

Matt 24:14

14 "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.

Matt 24:3

3 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?**"

Matt 28:19

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of **all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Matt 28:20

20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to **the end of the age.**" Amen.

Jesus clearly defined the term "end of the age" in the Olivet Discourse by identifying it with the end of the tribulation. Jesus placed the "great tribulation" just **before** the "end of the age" (Matt. 24:3,21,29). It is apparent that the "end of the age" in the Great Commission is also at the end of the tribulation. Therefore, to really obey the Great Commission we must preach the gospel to all nations until the "end of the age," which is the end of the tribulation.

In Mark's account of the Olivet Discourse Jesus ended with a stern warning and instructions for all Christians to watch for His posttribulation coming.

Mark 13:24-27,33-37

24 "But in those days, **after that tribulation**, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;

25 the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 **Then** they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

27 And **then** He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven. ...

33 Take heed, watch and pray; for **you do not know when the time is.**

34 It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and **gave authority to his servants**, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.

35 **Watch therefore**, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming — in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning —

36 lest, coming suddenly, he find **you** sleeping.

37 **And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!**"

This parable in Mark's account indisputably proves that Jesus' instructions were meant to apply to all Christians. He elsewhere told the disciples He was "going away," but would return for them. That refers to Jesus' ascension to heaven. He "*left His house*"; He "*gave authority to His servants*"; and He gave "*to every man his work*." These statements unquestionably refer to the Apostles and the Great Commission, thereby encompassing the entirety of this age. He commanded them to "watch" for His coming while carrying on this "work." Again, there is absolutely no question that Jesus was referring to the period of time between His ascension to heaven and His second coming, the age in which we live. He was referring to all Christians when He said, "watch." The question then is, watch for what? The context leaves no wiggle room for pretribulationists. The answer is in verses 24-27. We are all to watch for Jesus' coming "after the tribulation." Preachers are to teach all converts to obey Jesus, by watching for the signs of His posttribulation coming. Anything else is disobedience to Jesus Himself!