

Matthew, chapters 24-25 The Olivet Discourse—Q&A on the Temple’s Destruction and End of the Age

I | INTRODUCTION

1 / **Matthew, chapters 24-25**, is called ‘*The Olivet Discourse*’ because Jesus delivered it to His disciples “**As He sat on the Mount of Olives...**” ‘Olivet’ is an adjective to describe the location.

2 / This is now the 5th major discourse that Matthew records that Jesus delivered over the course of His ministry. The other major discourses that form the ‘five pillars of Matthew’s writing plan’ are: **chs 3-4; 10; 13; 18; 24-25**. Every one of these discourses expounds on some essential aspect of Matthew’s core, over-arching theme of Jesus’ ministry: **Making disciples of Jesus Christ and His Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven**. This is what Jesus will send His disciples [and us] to do in what we call ‘The Great Commission’ in **ch 28.16-20**.

3 / So, this impactful discourse will deal with the general question [in answer to His disciples’ questions]: ***How will the Kingdom come and human history end?*** HOWEVER, we need to understand that Jesus’ discourse’s purpose is to prepare them for a much-sooner event that was impending upon them at that moment—the destruction of their beloved temple and city. This event would occur only forty years from that moment—in 70 AD, when the Romans would invade Jerusalem, burn it to the ground, and massacre thousands of their citizens who had remained in the city.

4 / ***The relationship and connections between 70 AD and the coming of the Son of Man [Second Coming / Day of The LORD] is this: The 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem would serve as a ‘template’ or model of the Second Coming.*** So, there are *allusions* to the Second Coming here in the Olivet Discourse—the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple would serve as a ‘shadow’ of the end-time event. BUT, the primary warnings and descriptions of events that Jesus narrates here in **ch 24** will be fulfilled and occurring soon—even in their lifetimes. *We need to see that and interpret what Jesus is warning them about through the eyes and lens of what will ‘come upon them’ sooner, rather than later.* This perspective will help us understand not only the interpretation and application of Jesus’ message, but it will also help us to distinguish between ***what will happen in their generation*** and how it applies to and prepares us for ***what will happen at the end of this present age.***

5 / I gave you a word a couple weeks ago in this same context. Some of you said it helped you understand what I mean here. So I’m giving it to you again—this time in print. The word is ***pre-miniscent***. Yes, it’s actually a word. We know what ***reminiscent*** means: it is when something happens that reminds you of something you remember that has happened before—going over a previous, older memory. ***Pre-miniscent*** is something that happens now...but it is an announcement, prophecy, or anticipation of something like it that will happen in the future. So, in this context, ***the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD is ‘pre-miniscent’ of the Second Coming of Christ—or what Christ calls here ‘the coming of the Son of Man’ [see v 37].*** But, Jesus will give that generation instructions that were time-specific to that generation.

6 / In short, we must not think that *everything* Jesus prophesies here is reserved *only* for some yet-future event when Jesus surely will return and bring in ‘**the end,**’ or what we call ‘**the eschaton**’—***the end of all things that are now.*** In order to help us see these time-frame distinctions, we’ll point out the ‘time stamps’ that Jesus puts on these events as we unfold the narrative.

II | CONNECTIONS & CONTEXT

1 / Let’s keep in mind where we are at this moment in Jesus’ ministry...and what Jesus has said immediately before this that will help us keep the connections in those immediate events, conversations, and context. [1] Jesus has just announced again—with lamentation over them—that Jerusalem will soon be destroyed [**ch 23.37-39; along with Luke 19.41-44**]; [2] Jesus has already cursed the fig tree so that it withered and died—as a parable of the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and their whole religious system [**ch 21.18-20**]; [3] Jesus has already announced in parable form that “**He [God] will put those wretches to a miserable death...**” [**ch 21.41**]; in another parable [wedding feast], Jesus announced their fate under the

judgment of God: **“The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city” [ch 22.7].** And so, Jesus has already sentenced their city and temple to the destruction of the Romans—which He will fore-warn and foretell in more detail here in **ch 24**.

2 / So, our lesson today will focus on **ch 24**. **Ch 25** is a continuation of **ch 24**, but with more emphasis on how we must conduct ourselves in this age—between the events of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the Second Coming of Christ. We will barely have time to just point out how we must **“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour;”** which is Jesus’ watchword to us in this age [see **chs 24.36, 42, 44; 25.13**].

III | THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

1 / **Matthew 24 has parallels also in Mark 13 & Luke 21.** But since we are in Matthew, we’ll follow his narrative and consult **Mark 13 and Luke 21** when they will shed helpful light on how to interpret. **“To interpret Matthew 24 correctly, one must establish the context, structure, and parameters of the passage, understanding the questions the disciples ask and the ways in which Jesus does or does not answer them.”** (Daniel Doriani, ESV Expository Commentary)

2 / There are at least three prominent and distinctive movements in Matthew 24—noted by Matthew’s narrative transitions and Jesus’ own words:

(1) **24.1-3:** As the disciples gaze at the temple buildings, Jesus declares that the temple will be destroyed, and the disciples ask questions about this: **“When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”**

(2) **24:4-35:** Jesus prepares the disciples for the fall of the temple, which will happen during **“this generation” (24:34)**.

(3) **24.36—25.46:** Then Jesus comments on the end of the age.

IV | 24.1-3: As the disciples gaze at the temple buildings, Jesus declares that the temple will be destroyed, and the disciples ask questions about this: “When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

1 / **Jesus left the temple and was going away.** This is significant—in that when He leaves the temple this time, it is His last time to be in the temple: **see 21.12 & 23**. He knows He is leaving it to its soon destruction as He announces to His disciples. Because they immediately begin to express their admiration for its beauty and glory—and it was: **“Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” [Mark 13.1].** But its beauty was only outward—and its intended glory had long ago been tarnished and corrupted by the religious practices that were carried on in it. The temple had already been cursed in the cursing of the fig tree!

2 / So, Jesus reiterates the impending judgments of God soon to come upon them in the 70 AD event... **THIS IS THE SUMMARY STATEMENT OF EVERYTHING JESUS WILL SAY IN THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE: “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down!” Read again Luke 19.41-44.** Jesus had wept with this lamentation only this very morning before He entered the temple to ‘cleanse’ it. Now, He pronounces it again! Again, the disciples are stunned, blind-sided by this dire pronouncement. It was like another pallet of bricks had been dropped on their heads, crushing them with sadness and churning up all kinds of questions in them: how could this be? wasn’t this temple the focal point of the Kingdom of God and the representation of the Glory of God here on earth? how could it be destroyed?

3 / So, after they had walked away from the temple, out of the city, and had made their way to the Mount of Olives, and Jesus had sat down ... they asked their questions: **“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”** They are not thinking of the Second Coming. They hadn’t given one thought [yet] that there would be this intervening age in which we are now. They were still thinking of the coming of the fullness of God’s Kingdom *in that present moment*.

“Surely,” they thought, “if the temple is dismantled and destroyed, it must be because **“the Son of Man has come in His Glory.”** These events must mean that **“the end of the age”** has finally come!

4 / Their question is two-fold: **“*When* will these things be?”** [the destruction of their glorious temple] and **“*What* will be the signs...?”** [what should we look for? how will we know it’s about to take place?]

5 / And so, Jesus proceeds to tell them *when* the temple will be destroyed; and *what signs* they should look for to warn them of its soon-impending destruction.

V | 24:4-35: Jesus prepares the disciples for the fall of the temple, which will happen during “this generation” (24:34)

1 / Jesus’ prescient warnings to them center around two prominent instructions: **“See that no one leads you astray”** [v 4]; and **“See that you are not alarmed”** [v 6]. In other words: “Don’t be deceived and misled!” and “Don’t be afraid!”—because there will be many tribulations they must face in the soon-coming days. And their tribulations they would face would come in many forms...

- False ‘Christs’ and teachers/leaders who will offer them escape from the coming destructions [vv 5, 11, 23-26]
- There will be wars and rumors of yet more wars in various places [vv 6-7]
- There will be famines and earthquakes in various places [v 7]
- There will be fierce and deadly persecutions against them—they will be **“hated by all nations for my Name’s sake”**; **“many will fall away** [abandon and deny their faith in Christ] **“and betray one another and hate one another”**

2 / We need to recognize that all these tribulations have been the history of God’s faithful servants from the beginning of time [see ch 23.32-36]. They are NOT sign ONLY for the generations immediately preceding the Second Coming. **Jesus warns them that these tribulations were impending and coming on THEM in THEIR GENERATION.**

3 / In fact, Jesus specifically teaches them that THESE IMMEDIATE TRIBULATIONS DO NOT SIGNAL THE SECOND COMING—IT WAS COMING ON THEM IN THEIR DAY...AT THAT TIME.

- v 6: **“See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, *but the end is not yet.*”**
- v 8: **“*All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*”** And they will go on for a long time yet to come...
- v 14: **“And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”** [This is one of those ‘double-fulfilled prophecies’—‘the end’ that is coming may refer both to the ‘end of Jerusalem and the temple’ and ‘the eventual yet-to-come end of this Gospel age.’]

4 / v 15 ... BUT the surest and most final sign they should look for that portends the **“*when* will these things be”** and **“*what* will be the sign...”** of the destruction of the temple is found in v 15: **“So when you see the abomination of desolation** [or, ‘the abomination that makes desolate’] **spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)...”**

- This is Daniel’s prophecy in **Daniel 9.27; 11.31; 12.11.**
- This is NOT some future ‘abomination of desolation’ idol or image that is set up in some future ‘re-built temple. In fact, ‘the abomination of desolation’ is NOT even temple-specific.
- This ‘abomination of desolation’ is *the Roman armies that are staging, encircling, and surrounding Jerusalem in the couple of years before 70 AD—preparing to invade and destroy—not just the temple, but the entire city of Jerusalem.*
- We know this because that is how Luke describes it in his parallel Gospel account of this same message. Luke describes **“the abomination of desolation”** this way: **“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.”**
- It is an ‘abomination’ because they are god-less Gentiles [these Romans], and because all their banners and insignia of their warfare bear the images of their Caesar and their gods; and it ‘makes desolate’ because that’s what they will do.

5 / v 29 ... **HOWEVER, that immediate destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD is preminiscent of “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of Heaven with power and great Glory” [v 30].** Here’s where the destruction of Jerusalem begins to take on its ‘pre-miniscent’ character.

- The destruction of Jerusalem was the judgment of God on them because they had broken covenant faith with God—culminating in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- And just as the judgment of God fell upon them—just like the judgment of God had fallen on the whole world in **“the days of Noah” [vv 36-39]**—so the judgment of God will come upon the whole world when Jesus Christ does come again in the Last Day—at the end of this present age.
- Jesus will come again **“Immediately after the tribulation of those days...”** We have already seen how Jesus taught them [and us] that the tribulations that would commence *at that time—in their immediate days*—were only **‘the beginnings of the birth pains.’** They would continue on and on throughout the generations of the age to follow ... UNTIL the final tribulations that immediately Jesus’ Second Coming and He comes again in the final judgment AND the final salvation of His elect people.

6 / v 32 ... Jesus then refers again to the fig tree—using an illustration they all would understand. How do you know when summer is near? You know by watching the fig tree: when it starts leafing out, you know that summer has come. *All of these signs Jesus has given them in vv 3-28 ... when you see these signs coming to pass all around you, then every sign will be like a leaf that unfolds. The end is near!* And in their case, it was a sign to **“Flee! Run! Now! Get out of Jerusalem!”** See vv 15-21. The ‘leafing of the fig tree’—the historical events, circumstances, and developments around them will answer their questions: **“When will these things be...and what will be the signs of your coming and of the end of the age”!**

7 / v 34 ... Once again, Jesus returns to the immediate ‘time stamp’ He assigns to all the instructions He has given to **“you”** [that is, those who were living in that generation and even hearing His warnings]: **“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place”** [see also ch 23.36: **“Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation”**].

8 / So much more we could [and should] say about all these things...but time and space will not allow...

VI | 24.36—25.46: Then Jesus comments on the end of the age

1 / So now we come to the portion of this Olivet Discourse that Jesus assigns more specifically to His Second Coming—our generations since that 70 AD generation. Jesus contrasts the *‘pre-miniscent’* events that would portend and foretell the impending desolation of Jerusalem and their temple *with* **“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of Heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only...”**—that is, His Second Coming. BTW, His very coming itself will be its own sign [ch 24.27-28, 29-31].

2 / We can only ‘bullet-point’ some of the more prominent threads of Jesus’ instructions ... *and these belong to us!*

- **“No one knows the day and hour”** of **“the coming of the Son of Man.”** He will repeat this over and over... [ch 24.36, 42; 25.13]
- His Second Coming for judgment and salvation will be like **“as were the days of Noah...”**—everyone but His faithful servants will be indifferent, unprepared, even in denial... [ch 24.37-51]
- We must **“stay awake / be ready / prepared / faithfully serving”**—this is how we **“expect”** His coming again... [ch 24.42-51; parable of the ten virgins; parable of the talents]
- Jesus’ Second Coming is certain, sure, inevitable. **“When the Son of Man comes in His Glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious Throne...”** [ch 25.31-46]. And He will come with judgment upon all the world of unbelievers AND salvation for all His elect [ch 24.22, 24, 31; Mark 13.20]—those who will be gathered to Him in His Kingdom... **“And many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever”** [Daniel 12.2-3].

“SURELY I AM COMING SOON!” AMEN! COME, LORD JESUS! [Revelation 22.20]