

The Last Days

An In-Depth Study of Biblical Eschatology

The Olivet Discourse

Here are three preliminary notes:

1. I will use many of the notes like this one to give an interpretation of the Scripture passage in question, along with other differing interpretation(s).
2. There is a period of seven years in the End Times that is correctly called the Seventieth Week of Daniel ^{Daniel 9:24-27}. Jesus refers to the last half of these seven years as the "Great Tribulation" ^{Matthew 24:21} (translated "Great Distress" in the NIV). For consistency, I adopt the practice of calling the seven-year period: the Tribulation.
3. It is important to remember the target audience for the Gospel of Matthew: Jews.

Matthew 24-25 The Signs of the End Times

The Olivet Discourse was a teaching by Jesus, presented to His inner circle: Peter, James and John ^{Matthew 17:1, Mark 5:37, 14:32-33}, plus one: Peter's brother, Andrew ^{John 6:8}, while they were on the Mount of Olives ^{Mark 13:3}, just across the Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem. Similar End Times sermons are located in the gospels of Mark ^{Mark 13:1-37} & Luke ^{Luke 21:5-36}.

The Destruction of the Temple (24:1-2)

24:1-2 Just prior ^{Matthew 23:38}, Jesus stated God's "house" would be left "desolate". As Jesus left the Temple, His disciples, still confused about His earlier statement, called Jesus' attention to the immensity of the Temple buildings; however, Jesus reiterated His prophecy by being more specific about the destruction to come: "not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" ^{Luke 19:44}.

Herod the Great (who reigned from 37-4 B.C.) began constructing this Temple in 20 B.C. Herod's Temple was massive, but still under construction in A.D. 70, when it and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed by the Roman army under the command of Titus Vespasian.

The Signs of the Times (24:3-31)

24:3 Later, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, His four disciples approached Him with these three questions: "Tell us when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" ^{Matthew 13:39, 28:20}

The destruction of the Temple was not in the eschatological theology of the disciples, so they asked Jesus for clarification. They expected for His coming (*parousia*: presence) in triumph as Messiah to occur very soon. Even if they had accepted the approaching death of Jesus ^{Matthew 16:21, 17:23, 20:19}, they were not anticipating the long intervening Church-age.

The Last Days: 2 The Olivet Discourse

24:4-8 Jesus responded by exhorting them to not be deceived ^{Jeremiah 29:8, Ephesians 5:6}. He then cautioned them that the coming of false messiahs (man-made religion), wars (ultimate expression of man's desire to control), famines (suffering of the weak), earthquakes (natural disasters) will signal "the beginning of birth pains" ^{1 Thessalonians 5:3} (an analogy indicating the problems increase in frequency/intensity ^{2 Timothy 3:12-13}).

In these verses, Jesus described the events in the Church-age leading up to the Tribulation. However, the increase in intensity of the "birth pains" mentioned here will continue through the Tribulation ^{Revelation 6:1-17, 8:1-9:21, 16:1-21}, leading up to the physical return of Jesus.

24:9-14 Jesus continued by painting a bleak picture as a result of the upsurge in evil with time. There will be more and more people (in and out of Christianity/Judaism) who claim to be the answer to life's problems (false prophets ^{Jeremiah 23:16, 2 Peter 2:1}). Consequently, an increasing number of professing believers ^{1 John 2:19} will fall away from the faith and turn on true believers to aid in their persecution ^{John 15:20-25}, as civility ("love") will be in short supply ^{Matthew 10:21-22}. Just as Godly works are a proof of sincere belief ^{Matthew 3:8,10}, today, as in the end times, perseverance will also reveal genuine faith ^{Romans 5:3-5}. In spite of the terrible conditions, the redeemed will reach every nation with the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ ^{Revelation 14:6}.

This passage has application for both Christians in pre-Tribulation times and Jews during the Tribulation. The key to knowing the dual relevance is noted in two aspects of Jesus' last statement ^{v.14}: (1) the kingdom gospel will not be preached to the whole world until the Tribulation ^{Revelation 14:6} and (2) the final phrase in the text: "and then the end will come".

24:15 Jesus then reminded the disciples about a future event Daniel wrote about called the "abomination that causes desolation" ^{Daniel 9:27, 12:11}, when the Antichrist will defile the Temple by setting up an idol in the Holy of Holies at the mid-point of the Tribulation (mentioned in other NT passages ^{2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Revelation 13:14-15}). Daniel also spoke of an earlier event ^{Daniel 11:31} by Antiochus Epiphanes (c.167 B.C.) which was a foreshadowing of the end times desecration to come by the Antichrist.

In proclaiming Daniel the author of the OT book by the same name, Jesus eliminated any controversy about who wrote that Biblical text and when the information was documented.

This verse clearly sets the time-context: the middle of (3½ years into) the Tribulation.

24:16-22 These verses describe the horribleness of the last half of the Tribulation (called the Great Tribulation ^{Revelation 7:14} and a time of Jacob's trouble ^{Jeremiah 30:7}). The "mountains" of refuge are probably those near the Dead Sea (to the west or southeast in Moab or Edom ⇒ Jordan). In the Middle East, roofs are used for many activities ^{1 Samuel 9:25, Acts 10:9}. Jesus was emphasizing urgency in response to those

Please forward questions/concerns about these notes to ron price, 505-294-4743, ron@hopeinchristnm.com.

The Last Days: 2 The Olivet Discourse

times, the incredible hardship on pre- & post-birth mothers ^{Luke 23:29}, the added hardship that the Sabbath or bad weather would add, and that those times would be the worst ever faced upon the earth ^{Daniel 12:1, Joel 2:2}. In God's mercy, the duration of the time of ultimate upheaval will be "shortened" (ending it before total destruction).

Three aspects of these verses reveal the time will be distinctly Jewish. The references to: (1) the residents of Israel ^{v.16}, (2) the use of roof tops ^{v.17} and (3) the Sabbath ^{v.20}. Also, the description of events pin-points the timeframe to be the last half of the Tribulation.

24:23-28 In this section of Scripture, Jesus reiterated the importance of not believing in the many false "Christ^s" that will (and do) appear ^{Luke 17:23}. These self-proclaimed prophets are all considered to be an "antichrist" ^{2 John 1:7} who will come in "the spirit of the antichrist" ^{1 John 4:3}. He prophesied about the "great signs and miracles" the false Christs will perform ^{Exodus 7:11, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11, Revelation 13:13}, but states true believers will not be deceived and the Second Coming will be obvious to all ^{Luke 17:24}. His final point is that people can be drawn even to a dead body ^{Luke 17:37}.

While Jesus did not mention him here, the ultimate Antichrist ^{1 John 2:18,22} will be the prominent figure on earth throughout the entire Tribulation period ^{Revelation 13:1-10}.

Aspects of this passage are applicable today, but the main focus is on the Great Tribulation.

24:29-31 Jesus then quoted two OT verses ^{Isaiah 13:10, 34:4} with prophetic images concerning great changes in the heavenly bodies (the sun, moon, stars as part of the prophesied Day of the Lord ^{Isaiah 13:9, Joel 2:10,31}) that will take place in connection with the three sets of seven judgements of God (the Seal, Trumpet & Bowl Judgements) during the 7-years of Tribulation. These heavenly occurrences will be overshadowed by the "sign" of the Glorious Appearing ^{Titus 2:13} (the Second Coming ^{Revelation 19:11-16}) of the "Son of Man" ^{Matthew 16:27, 26:64} with the clouds ^{Revelation 1:7} of Heaven ^{Daniel 7:13}. The "nations of the earth will mourn" over the loss of their earthly greatness and power ^{Revelation 18:9-10,15-17,19}, but the greatest mourning that will occur will be by Israel ^{Zechariah 12:10-12}, who will grieve over their rejection of the Messiah. Jesus will "send his angels" to "gather His elect" ^{Matthew 13:41}, and thus usher in the Millennium.

There are some confusing aspects of this passage: the description of Jesus "coming on the clouds sky" and the use of "a loud trumpet call" are reminiscent of the imagery associated with the Rapture ^{1 Thessalonians 4:13-18}. However, in the context of this teaching of Jesus (the Olivet Discourse), it seems apparent He is referring to His Glorious Appearing.

I tend to agree with the interpretation that the Second Coming is a two-phase process.

The first phase is when Jesus comes in the clouds and is bodily met by His Church (both the dead and the living) in the air ^{1 Thessalonians 4:13-18} (referred to as the Rapture), which occurs

Please forward questions/concerns about these notes to ron price, 505-294-4743, ron@hopeinchristnm.com.

The Last Days: 2 The Olivet Discourse

prior to the Tribulation. The second phase is His physical return to earth ^{Revelation 19:11-16} (referred to as His Second Coming), which will occur at the completion of the Tribulation.

The words "caught up" ^{1 Thessalonians 4:14} is the translation of the Greek word *harpazō*, which when translated into Latin is *rapturo*, which when transliterated into English is "Rapture".

The Parable of the Fig Tree (24:32-35)

24:32-35 For emphasis, Jesus used an analogy familiar to the Jewish people: the closeness of summer following the sprouting of fig leaves, to underscore the nearness of His return when the events He previously detailed ^{v.9-29} are observed. A better translation of the word "generation" ^{v.34} would be "race" (*genea*), referring to the Hebrew race to be restored ^{Daniel 9:24-27, Zechariah 12:10-13:1} during the Tribulation. Jesus said His Word is eternal ^{Isaiah 40:8}, even though the universe is not ^{2 Peter 3:10-13}.

The Greek word translated "it" ^{v.33} could also be "he", but both refer to His return ^{v.30}.

This passage is reemphasizing to the Jews and Gentiles of today what is ahead for them.

The Lesson of the Time of Noah (24:36-44)

24:36 At the time, the only one aware of the exact timing of the detailed events was God the Father. Jesus reminded His apostles of this again at His Ascension ^{Acts 1:7}.

Once the Rapture occurs and the Antichrist confirms "a covenant with" Israel for one "seven" ^{Daniel 9:27}, then the timing of the rest of the events will be in view (e.g., the Second Coming will occur seven years after the covenant). The only event that can happen without any warning (with the timing being a total surprise) is the Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

24:37-39 Surprisingly, it was not the great wickedness ^{Genesis 6:5} before the flood ("in the days of Noah") that Jesus emphasized, but the people's preoccupation in the everyday matters of life ("eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage" ^{Luke 17:17}), as a pattern for the preparation for judgement in the End Times. The world system and the earth will receive judgement, while the Jews will face a cleansing during the Tribulation ^{Revelation 6-19}. At the close of the Tribulation, all non-believers will be judged by Jesus at His Second Coming, and they will be killed and sent to Hades. Prior to both judgements, most of the people on the earth will be living in a similar manner to the pre-flood people: they will be living in a spiritually blind condition, as if everything is OK, but at the same time, they will be increasingly sinful.

Many Christian scholars and pastors interpret this passage as applying to the Tribulation. However, I lean toward the belief that it and the succeeding verses ^{v.40-51} fit better when applied to the part of the Church-age that we are in today, leading up to the End Times.

The Last Days: 2 The Olivet Discourse

24:40-44 The passage starts with an image of people being divided ^{Luke 17:34-35} into two groups. Later, Jesus illustrated the graphic judgement of dividing the saved and unsaved by speaking of the separation of "the sheep from the goats" ^{Matthew 25:31-33}. This judgement is envisioned to take place at the time of the Second Coming. This is followed by Jesus' warnings to "keep watch" ^{Luke 12:15, 2 John 1:8} & "be ready" ^{Luke 12:40}, which is also His way of saying "be prepared", because He wants His followers to have a sense of urgency to do His Kingdom work ^{1 Peter 4:7-10} while awaiting His coming (*parousia*: presence) that could happen at any time.

As I mentioned before, I believe another judgement separating the two sides will be the Rapture ^{1 Thessalonians 4:15-17}, which will occur Pre-Tribulation, and fits these details better.

It seems that the "owner of the house" must be Satan, because he is the "prince of this world" ^{John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11}, the "god of this age" ^{2 Corinthians 4:4}, and one who has a tremendous amount of power on this earth ^{1 John 5:19} (although somewhat restrained ^{2 Thessalonians 2:7}).

The Parable of the Two Servants (24:45-51)

24:45-51 In this parable, Jesus (the master) contrasted the "faithful & wise servant" (a genuine believer) and the "wicked" servant (an unbeliever). When Jesus returns, He will find the believer doing the work of His Father and will share His inheritance with His follower ^{Matthew 25:21,23, 1 Peter 1:3-5}. However, He will see that the unbeliever did not take His return seriously ^{2 Peter 3:3-4} and will hold him accountable for many blessings he received without appreciating who provided them, as well as his having to answer for his treatment of his fellow man ^{1 John 4:20}. As a result, all people who reject God will receive a severe, but just punishment ^{Matthew 8:12, Revelation 20:11-15}.

Again, there are two views as to the time setting: before or during the Tribulation.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (25:1-13)

As before ^{Matthew 24}, there are two interpretations of these parables: (1) all three focus on the Second Coming of Jesus or (2) the first two (Ten Virgins ^{v.1-13} and Talents ^{v.14-30}) fit best into a Pre-Tribulation (Church-age) time-frame and the third (Sheep and Goats ^{v.31-46}) is definitely applicable to the time of the Glorious Appearing at the end of the Tribulation.

25:1-10 The Jewish "virgins" in this parable were obviously bridesmaids who had the responsibility for helping their friend to prepare for the coming of her bridegroom, who would take her to the bridal chamber for the completion of the marriage ^{John 3:29}. Half of the bridesmaids (the "wise") had oil and half (the "foolish") did not. The oil represented the presence of the Holy Spirit ^{1 Samuel 16:13} in the lives of the "wise" bridesmaids and His absence from the "foolish" ones. The bridesmaids fell asleep while waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom, but were awakened by a warning

The Last Days: 2 The Olivet Discourse

shout ^{1 Thessalonians 4:16, 5:6}. Immediately, they were all in need of the light from their lamps ^{Luke 12:35}, so the foolish requested some oil from the wise, but the wise would not (were not able to) share their oil (the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, because each person must obtain Him the same way: by asking Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of their life ^{Romans 10:11-13}). While the foolish went to obtain oil, the rest of the wedding party went to the wedding celebration and shut the door ^{Revelation 19:9}.

The Greek word for "virgin" (*parthenos*) literally means an unmarried daughter ^{Luke 1:27}.

There are people who say that at the last minute, they will accept Jesus and be saved just before it is too late. However, this parable is a powerful lesson that those people will not have a chance to do that, because when the end comes (whether it is earthly death, the Rapture or the end of the Tribulation), there will not be time for them to suddenly get right with Jesus Christ, receive the Holy Spirit and thus gain entrance into the Kingdom of God.

25:11-13 Later, the foolish bridesmaids came to join the wedding celebration, but were barred from entering, because, while they may have appeared to be believers (they attended church, were 'good' people, donated money, etc), they never developed a personal relationship with Jesus, because He said: "I don't know you" (or as He also said: "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers." ^{Matthew 7:21-23}). The main emphasis of this parable is to encourage all people to prepare now, to not delay on the decision to be saved ^{2 Corinthians 6:1-2} and to "keep watch" for His coming.

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)

25:14-23 In this parable (Luke noted a similar parable ^{Luke 19:12-27}), the man going on the journey represents Jesus and the three servants are professing believers. Showing discernment for what each servant could handle, the man entrusted the first servant with 5 talents of "money", the second 2 talents and the third 1 talent. Each of the first two servants invested their money wisely and doubled the amount they were given; however, the third servant buried his money in a hole in the ground. On his return, Jesus praised the first two servants starting with: "Well done, good and faithful servant!", signifying the genuineness of their faith. Note the two servants received the same reward (Jesus put them "in charge of many things"), indicating the reward was based on their faithfulness to Jesus Christ and not on the magnitude of their original amount or the level of their results ^{Matthew 20:1-16}.

A "talent" was a unit of weight equal to approximately 75 pounds. So, the value of the money would depend on the type of "money" (precious metal) that was given, probably silver or gold.

25:24-27 The servant with 1 talent accused Jesus of being a cruel and ruthless opportunist, and he admitted he hid the money because of his fear of losing the original money in a bad investment. His fear of Jesus, lack of knowledge of who

The Last Days: 2 The Olivet Discourse

Jesus was/is and his rejection of Jesus as Creator exposed him as an unbeliever. In repeating the servant's words ^{v.26}, Jesus was not agreeing, but allowing the servant to be condemned by his own words (and deeds ^{Jeremiah 17:10, Revelation 20:12}). By pointing out a perfectly safe way the money could have been invested, Jesus confronted the servant with the fact that the actual reason he buried the money was not because of fear, but was the result of him being "wicked" and "lazy".

An interesting note: the word twice translated as "money" ^{v.18,27} literally means "silver".

25:28-30 Jesus instructed someone to take the talent and give in to the first servant. With these actions, Jesus specified His generosity for those who are His obedient servants ^{Mark 4:25a} and His willingness to hold accountable those who reject Him as their Lord and Savior ^{Mark 4:25b}. Once again, the judgement of unbelievers will be monumentally serious ^{Matthew 24:51, Luke 13:28}, but righteous ^{Psalms 9:4, 1 Peter 2:23}.

The modern use of the word "talent" is derived from this parable. Some believe it is an "erroneous application", but it seems reasonable that humans have an obligation to "invest" their God-given talents that are designed to be "gifts" ^{Hebrews 2:4} in service to Him.

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats (25:31-46)

25:31-33 There is no question these verses speak of post-Tribulation times when Jesus will come back to rule and reign on the Davidic throne ^{Isaiah 9:6-7, 16:5, Luke 1:30-33}, with the Christians ruling with Him ^{Matthew 19:28}. During that time, He will judge the people of the nations (the righteous and the wicked ^{Psalms 1, Malachi 3:18}) to determine who will live on into the Millennium (believers: sheep ^{Psalms 79:13}) and who will be sent to Hades (unbelievers: goats) to wait for their final judgement ^{Revelation 20:11-15}.

25:34-45 The basis for God's judgement is faith, not works (fruit) ^{Ephesians 2:8-9}. However, the actions (works of service that produce fruit ^{Ephesians 2:10}) of a person are important expressions of what kind of faith a person has ^{James 2:14-26}, and reflects who or what they genuinely believe ^{John 3:15-16} and trust in ^{Proverbs 3:5-6, Romans 15:13}. Jesus mentioned the following specific needs, to represent all needs that should be met by believers: food, drink, friendliness, clothing, sickness, imprisonment. Meeting the needs of His people is a way to express honor toward God. ^{Proverbs 14:31}

There is a curious difference in the way Jesus responded to the righteous and the wicked. He told the righteous that their service to "these brothers of mine" (probably referring to His followers) was the same as having served Him. However, His statement to the wicked seemed to imply that those people really hadn't served anyone (except themselves).

25:46 Jesus concluded His teaching by expressing the eternal nature of His final judgements: both good (heaven) ^{Revelation 22:1-5} and bad (hell) ^{Revelation 14:10-11, 20:10}.

Please forward questions/concerns about these notes to ron price, 505-294-4743, ron@hopeinchristnm.com.