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A0536 – September 4, 2005 – Matthew 24:1-30 – The Olivet Discourse

The Olivet Discourse, delivered shortly before Jesus' crucifixion, is the most important single passage of prophecy in all the Bible. It is significant because it came from Jesus Himself immediately after He was rejected by His own people and because it provides the master outline of end-time events.

- Dr. Tim Lahaye

Matthew 24 is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus gave this discourse to his disciples while sitting on the Mount of Olives. It is also known by many as the 'Little Apocalypse' because it is a sketch of Rev 6-19 given by Jesus 65 years before. All three of the synoptic gospels record this discourse, Mark in chapter 13 and Luke in chapter 21. There have been widely varying interpretations of it. There is the past fulfillment view which believes Matt 24:1-34 were fulfilled in 70AD. There is the present fulfillment view which believes Matt 24 is being fulfilled during the Church Age (post-tribulationism). Finally, there is the future fulfillment view which believes Matt 24-25 are describing events that are totally future (pre-tribulationism). My study has concluded that the futurist view of the discourse is correct.

The previous context of Matthew is important to understanding the discourse.

1. Jesus offered Himself to Israel as Her King (Matt 4-11).
2. The national leaders of Israel rejected Jesus' Messiahship (Matt 12)
3. Jesus rejected the nation of Israel (Matt 23)
4. Jesus will not return until Israel says "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matt 23:39).

That sets the context for Jesus' most extensive discourse in Scripture. Let's outline the passage of interest and show parallels with Revelation 6-19.

Matt

Rev

I.	The Setting	24:1-2	
II.	The Questions	24:3	
III.	1 st Half of the Tribulation	24:4-8	
	A. Warning	24:4	
	B. False Christ's	24:5	6:2
	C. Warfare and Bloodshed	24:6-7	6:3-4
	D. Famine	24:7	6:5-6
	E. Pestilence & Death	24:7	6:7-8
	F. Earthquake and Blackout	24:8; Luke 21:11	6:12-14
IV.	2 nd Half of the Tribulation	24:9-28	
	A. Jews hated & killed	24:9	12:12-17
	B. Jews betray and hate one another	24:10	?
	C. Many Jews deceived	24:11	13:11-18
	D. Jew who endures saved	24:13	?
	E. Gospel preached to all	24:14	14:6; 7:1-17
	F. The abomination of desolation	24:15	13:4-5, 12-15?
	G. Israel flee to mountains	24:16-20	12:12-17
	H. Great Tribulation (latter 3 ½ years)	24:21-22	11:3;12:6,14;13:5
	I. Signs and wonders	24:23-26	13:13-14
	J. Nature of Son of Man's return	24:27	?
	K. Judgment on unbelieving Israel	24:28	14:18-20?
V.	The Second Coming	24:29-31	
	A. Blackout and Cosmic Disturbances	24:29	19:1-8
	B. The sign: Shechinah Glory	24:30a	?
	C. The tribes of earth mourn	24:30b	1:7
	D. The Son of Man appears	24:30c	19:11-16
	E. Israel Regathered	24:31	Rom 9:11

I. The Setting (24:1-2)

Matthew 24:1-2 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. ² And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

What we have here is Jesus and His disciples walking out and away from Herod's Temple which was still under construction. The disciples point out the beauty of the temple buildings to Jesus. In verse 2 Jesus turns and looks at Herod's Temple and predicts its

future destruction. This prophecy was fulfilled in 70AD when Titus and the Roman armies burned the Temple (Luke 21:20-24). The Western Wall that you see Jews praying at was a part of the foundation of this Temple. The foundation itself was not considered a part of the Temple so Jesus was not mistaken when He said “not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” There is a break between vs 2-3 giving them time to walk from the Temple to the Mount of Olives. In v. 3 some of the disciples came to Jesus privately. We know from Mark 13:3 that this was Peter, James, John and Andrew. These four disciples asked Jesus two questions. The English text appears like three questions but the Greek grammar indicates that there are really two questions in view and the second question has two facets.

II. The Questions (24:3)

Matthew 24:3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming and ~~of the~~ end of the age?"

Question 1: “When will these things happen?”

Question 2: “What *will be* the sign of Your coming and end of the age?”

Question 1: “When will these things happen?” is a question about when the Temple is going to be destroyed. Matthew does not record Jesus’ answer to this question but Luke does in his parallel account (cf Luke 21:7; 20-24). We’re not going to deal with that question today suffice it to say one thing. The questioners took for granted that all three things went together: destruction of temple, advent of Son of Man, end of the current age (Bruce). But they were mistaken and Jesus had to correct them. The impending judgment of Jerusalem and Herod’s Temple were not to be associated with His coming and the end of the age. Instead, Herod’s Temple would be destroyed (cf 24:2) but a Tribulation temple would undergo the abomination of desolation (cf Matt 24:15; Dan 9:27; 11:31 –fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes as a type – 168BC; 12:11).

Let’s look at the second question “What will be the sign of Your coming and end of the age”. The way the four disciples ask Jesus this question shows that they thought His coming and the end of the age were closely linked. This connection is correct.

Question 2: “What *will be* the sign of Your coming and ~~of the~~ end of the age?” The end of the age is a question regarding the age just preceding the Messianic Kingdom. Jesus answers this two-part question in two ways: First, He says there are signs that do not signal

the end (4-8) and then He says there are signs that do signal the end (9-14). Second, of His coming Jesus describes events that are not signs of His coming (23-26) and then events that are signs of His coming (30). The specific sign of His coming will appear after the Tribulation (v 29) when the sky is completely darkened.

III. 1st Half of the Tribulation (24:4-8)

A. Warning (24:4)

Matthew 24:4 *And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you.*

First, in verse 4 Jesus gives us a key to interpreting the discourse. He says, ***"See to it that no one misleads you."*** In other words, see that no one causes you to be deceived. The best way to avoid deception is to properly understand Jesus' discourse.

B. False Christ's (24:5; cf Rev 6:2)

Matthew 24:5 *"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many."*

The word ***For*** (*gar*) indicates an explanation for why they should not be misled. The basic reason they should not be misled is because ***many will come in His name, saying, 'I am the Christ' and will mislead many.*** The true Messiah's coming will not be an "obscure event but as manifest and evident as a bolt of lightning stretching from sky to sky" (Toussaint, 276). So, at some future point many will claim to be the Christ and will ***mislead*** many. Many scholars have noted that this verse is parallel to the 1st Seal Judgment in Rev 6:2. Both describe "false Christ's". Therefore, Jesus begins the Tribulation in Matt 24:5. Many will go forth claiming to be the Christ and one of these will be the ultimate end-times Antichrist.

C. Warfare and Bloodshed (24:6-7b; cf. Rev 6:3-4)

Matthew 24:6 *"You will be about to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end." For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,"*

This will be an apparent time of peace but it will be very short and they, that is Israel, *will be about to hear of wars and rumors of wars*. We would say actual wars and cold wars. Many people have taught or thought that the 1st half of the Tribulation will be a time of world peace but it will only be peace for Israel (Dan 9:27). As for the world there will be a very short time of peace and then that peace will be taken away by warfare and bloodshed.

Even though there will be many *wars and rumors of wars* Israel should *not be frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end*. Why should they not be *frightened*? Because their Messiah is going to return to rescue the believing remnant at the *end* (v 29-31). Therefore, Jesus says, don't be afraid *for those things must take place*. The phrase *must take place* is a frequent eschatological phrase. For example it is used in Rev 4:1 of the things which *must take place after these things*, a reference to the Tribulation (Rev 6-19). Just because there are about to be wars and rumors of wars this *is not yet the end*.

These verses describe war on a global scale. These are not localized wars but global wars. Verses 6-7b find their parallel in the 2nd Seal judgment in Rev 6:4. Both describe "wars" and "international discord".

D. Famine (24:7c; cf Rev 6:5-6)

Matthew 24:7c and in various places there will be famines...."

This corresponds to the 3rd seal: famine described in Rev 6:5-6. These are not just local famines but global famines. No person has ever seen a famine with such physical and economic impact as described here.

E. Pestilence & Death (Luke 21:11; Rev 6:7-8)

Luke 21:11 and in various places plagues and famines;

Although not recorded in Matthews account, Luke's parallel mentions plagues or diseases. These plagues correspond to the 4th seal: death to ¼ of the human population. During this time people will die by warfare, famine, pestilence and wild beasts (cf Rev 6:7-8).

F. Earthquake & Cosmic Disturbances (24:7c; Luke 21:11; cf Rev 6:12-17)

Matthew 24:7c and in various places there will be...earthquakes."

Luke 21:11 *and there will be great earthquakes...and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.*

While the 5th seal has no parallel in either Matt, Mark, or Luke's account the reasons are obvious: the 5th seal is martyrs in heaven with no observable events on earth. Thus, Jesus excludes them from His discourse since they could not serve as signs. However, the 6th seal does have parallels: a great earthquake and cosmic disturbances, both mentioned by Jesus in Luke 21:11.

Matthew 24:8 *"But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."*

False Christ's, global wars, international discord, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, and cosmic disturbances are all *merely the beginning of birth pangs*. The world has never seen anything like this. The *birth pangs* will be discussed in more detail next week, suffice it to say now that the *birth pangs* begin at the beginning of the Tribulation and close at the end of the Tribulation. There are two stages in the birth pangs; labor and hard labor. The first half of the Tribulation is known as labor and the second half as hard labor. The result of the birth pangs is the birth of the Messianic Kingdom into history. The birth pangs obviously correspond to a woman's travails when she goes into labor and is about to give birth to a baby. So, Matt 24:4-7 describes the beginning stages of the Tribulation and correspond to the first six seals. As the world passes through these beginning pangs they will increasingly writhe with anguish on a scale incomprehensible to human beings. But these are not signs of the end (Matt 24:6). Only the events described in Matt 24:9-28 constitute signs of the end.

IV. 2nd Half of the Tribulation

24:9-28

This larger section is Jesus' description of the 2nd half of the Tribulation. What is unique about this section is that verses 9-14 parallel or occur simultaneously with verses 16-26. This observation has gone relatively unnoticed or unmentioned by scholars and helps clarify the difficult placement of verses 4-14 (either pre-tribulation, tribulation or some combination). My conclusion shows that all the verses are tribulation verses but vv 4-8 refer to the first half and 9-14 refer to the second half. This does not mean that v 15 cannot be the mid-point of the Tribulation. The careful student will notice the many parallel's often by way of cause-effect relationship between vv 9-14 and 16-26. For example, for a Jew to avoid being killed (24:9) he will need to flee to the mountains (24:16-20). The key for Israel is observing the sign of the abomination of desolation which occurs in the

Matthew 24:13 "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved."

The Jew who does endure to the end of the tribulation will be saved. Here the "saved" is not spiritual salvation but physical salvation as the context of verse 9 militates. Scholars agree that the word "saved" is very broad lexically and was most often used of physical salvation in the OT.

E. Gospel preached to all 24:14 14:6; 7:1-17

Matthew 24:14 "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.

During this time, particularly beginning at the mid-point of the tribulation the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached once more. This gospel of the kingdom was preached by John the Baptist (Matt 3:1) and Jesus (Matt 4:17). Anytime the kingdom is near the good news of the kingdom is preached. Here the time is appropriate. We are not in the kingdom now, the kingdom is yet future when Jesus will reign on earth over all the nations. After this gospel of the kingdom is preached to the whole world then the end will come.

F. The abomination of desolation 24:15 13:4-5, 12-15?

Matthew 24:15 "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

The key word here is *therefore* it is placed here to give explanation of vv 9-14. This is the key event albeit disgusting. When Israel sees the abomination of desolation that Daniel the prophet spoke about (Dan 9:27 and others) they need to flee in order to avoid death (v 9). Only those Jews who are not deceived (24:4, 11) will realize the significance of this sign for they are the only one's who will have any interest in the NT scriptures signaled by the cryptic words *let the reader understand*.

G. Israel flee to mountains 24:16-20 12:12-17

Matthew 24:16-20 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. ¹⁸ "Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. ¹⁹ "But woe to

those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ²⁰ *"But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.*

The Israelites in Judea who realize the significance of the abomination of desolation will flee to the mountains where they will be supernaturally preserved by God. This must be a swift evacuation or else their escape will be plagued by difficulties and death. The evacuation will not be met with joy by those Jews who have aligned themselves with false Christ's or false prophets. They will in fact try to stone to death those Jews who would evacuate on a Sabbath and clearly those who are pregnant or nursing would have difficulty evacuating. Nor would it be good if their flight was in winter for the Judean wilderness is plagued by flash floods that time of year and could place many in great danger or sweep them away to death. It is my contention that the prayer of Jewish believers during this time will be the means God uses to keep them from these possible dangers (v 20).

H. Great Tribulation (latter 3 ½ years) 24:21-22 11:3;12:6,14;13:5

Matthew 24:21-22 "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. ²² "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

These verses are important and designate the 2nd half of the Tribulation as the Great Tribulation, also known as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer 30:6-7). Both of these periods are described as unparalleled times of trouble. Since there can be only one unparalleled time of trouble for the world then these two periods must both cover the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation. It is apparent from Jesus' words that if the Great Tribulation lasted even one day more than 3 ½ years that all human life would be destroyed. The grammar indicates that the phrase *those days will be cut short* means that God fixed them in His predetermined plan to last just 3 ½ years and not a day longer. He has done this for the sake of the elect and the result will be that they re-populate the earth in the Millennial Kingdom.

I. Signs and wonders 24:23-26 13:13-14

Matthew 24:23-26 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. ²⁴ "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ "Behold, I have told you in advance. ²⁶ "So if they say to you, 'Behold,

He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them.

Even though there will be many signs and wonders during this time they should not be deceived by these wonder workers. Christ's coming will not take place in a corner, it is a public event visible to the whole world. Jesus has told us this in advance. Therefore, there is no excuse for being deceived.

J. Nature of Son of Man's return 24:27 ?

Matthew 24:27 *"For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

Christ's coming will be an event that no one will miss.

K. Judgment on unbelieving Israel 24:28 14:18-20?

Matthew 24:28 *"Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

A difficult verse with a few interpretations. Some hold that the corpse is Israel and the vultures are the nations gathering to destroy Israel at the battle of Armageddon. This interpretation has some merit. Others, like Toussaint take a more symbolic interpretation. Other's place it after the Tribulation and Armageddon. Literally, the vultures will gather to eat upon the flesh of kings and men who aligned themselves with the Antichrist. I prefer to link this with Luke 17:34-37 and Matt 24:36-41 in which case the ones taken are taken in judgment, the corpses left on the earth for the vultures to feast on and the one left is left alive on earth to enter the Millennium and re-populate the earth. This could possibly correspond to Rev 14:18-20 if the "vine of the earth" corresponds to Israel. The reason I take this interpretation is because this verse takes place before the Tribulation ends (cf v 29) and it fits well with the two passages mentioned above.

V. The Second Coming 24:29-31

A. Blackout and Cosmic Disturbances 24:29 19:1-8

Matthew 24:29 ²⁹ "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

The first event following immediately after the Tribulation is a worldwide blackout and cosmic disturbances.

B. The sign: Shechinah Glory 24:30a ?

Matthew 24:30 *"And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky,*

Against the backdrop of a black sky the sign of the Son of Man will appear. Since the sign of Christ's 1st coming was the Shechinah Glory it makes sense that the sign of His 2nd coming will be the same Shechinah Glory (the visible presence of God). Against the backdrop of a black sky a tremendous light will shine forth as the sign. This answers the disciples question about the sign of the coming of the Son of Man.

C. The tribes of earth mourn 24:30b 1:7

Matthew 24:30 *and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn,*

As a result of the sign appearing the tribes of the earth will mourn. This is not limited to Israel but to all the people groups of the earth. They mourn because they are not prepared with salvation.

D. The Son of Man appears 24:30c 19:11-16

Matthew 24:30 *and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.*

Then the Son of Man Himself will appear in the sky

E. Israel Regathered 24:31 Rom 9:11

Matthew 24:31 *"And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.*

Following the Son of Man's appearance in the sky He will send forth His angels to the four corners of the earth and regather Israel (cf Dt 30).

This discourse lays the groundwork for Revelation 6-18 and provides a framework for the timing. This framework places the first 6 seals during the 1st half of the Tribulation and the trumpet and bowl judgments during the 2nd half of the Tribulation.

CHART SHOWING PARALLELS BETWEEN REV 6 AND MATT 24

	Revelation 6	Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
False Messiah's False Prophets	2	5, 11	6	8
Wars	2-4	6-7	7	9
International discord	3-4	7	8	10
Famines	5-8	7	8	11
Pestilences	8			11
Persecution, Martyrdom	9-11	9	9-13	12-17
Earthquakes	12	7	8	11
Cosmic Phenomena	12-14			11

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Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*

Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King!*

Renald Showers, *Maranatha, Our Lord Come!*

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