

# **GOD'S PATHWAY THROUGH PROPHECY**

## **JESUS' OLIVET DISCOURSE**

### **(MATTHEW 24:1-31)**

**Introduction:** A progressive study of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week leads logically and theologically to a careful consideration of Jesus' Olivet Discourse. Daniel's treatment of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week, and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24, both look at the same prophetic period in God's inspired unfolding flow of history future. Before embarking on a full observation of Jesus' Sermonic Discourse delivered upon the Mount of Olives it is needful to set forth a careful introduction and interpretive outline. Such an outline will serve two practical purposes. First, outlining Jesus' discourse fixes the context and paves the way for a more in-depth analysis of the force and flow of Jesus' prophetic sermon. Second, an expositional outline not only establishes the immediate context, it also provides a comparative matrix which establishes the major timeframes and events in both Jesus' prophetic teachings and the prophecy of Daniel's final seven-year period of apocalyptic activity. In the end, such a comparative analysis categorically demonstrates that the Olivet Discourse expands and expounds the same final seven-year period long before introduced by Daniel. Jesus' final sermon adds much needed meat to the bones of Daniel's prophetic skeleton. In short, the Olivet Discourse gives a fuller sense of the theological structure and scope of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week, and sets forward Jesus' authoritative witness to the fact that the final seven-year period of Bible prophecy must be understood as a composite of three distinct and well-defined periods comprising God's eschatological program for the ages. A clear and comprehensive outline of Jesus' Olivet Discourse comparatively confirms that the prophetic period known as Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week actually consists of three distinct and sequential eschatological elements. These three events are: 1) The Time of Birth-Pangs, 2) The Great Tribulation, and finally, 3) The Day of the Lord. Based upon Jesus' personal prophetic paradigm we shall see that these three events occur in a divinely determined order, and bring about the final summation of this present earthly age as the world that now is, passes away and moves into that world which shall be hereafter.

#### **I. A STRUCTURAL OUTLINE of Jesus' Olivet Discourse!**

*And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you (Mt. 24:1-4).*

##### **A. The Historical SETTING of the Discourse – vs. 1-4.**

###### **1. Its Period – “And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple”**

The historical background of Jesus' Olivet Discourse is centered around Herod's famed Temple in Jerusalem. Following His triumphal entry of Passion Week, and His subsequent second cleansing of the Temple, Jesus began a series of teachings, each taking place inside the Temple precinct. This culminated with Jesus' scathing diatribe against the religious leaders of the Jewish people, and His final denunciation of the nation as a whole so that the house of Israel was officially left desolate and doomed for destruction (Mat. 23). Thereafter Jesus officially departed once-for-all from the Temple precinct and left it behind for good. As Jesus was departing from the Temple His disciples approached Him and desired to turn His attention back to the majestic edifices of the Temple complex. Being yet carnally minded, they were still focused upon the very things Jesus had just officially forsaken in His persevering pursuit of His Father's business. The very Temple that was so appealing to men, had already become an object of abhorrence to God. Thus, ever being in perfect harmony with His Father, Jesus not only goes out and departs from the temple literally and physically, but also symbolically and spiritually. Jesus formally forsook the Temple, and without His personal presence in the Temple, even the Temple itself became nothing more than an empty, lifeless religious relic void of power or purpose. God's House had truly been reduced to a den of thieves, robbers, and extortioners!

*“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives”* – Having exited the Temple precincts, Jesus went forth from the city of Jerusalem and began His ascent up the Mount of Olives where He would ultimately assume His posture for preaching. Olivet provided a more than proper pulpit for such a prophetic message. What made Olivet such a proper place for Jesus' preaching ministry? Because Jesus' sermon spotlights His ultimate visible return in glory to this earth. Christ's future second advent was proclaimed from the very geographical location where it will one day be fleshed out and fulfilled. At the very location from which Jesus preached His final sermon on earth, He shall one day return to earth. Scripture reveals this fascinating fact concerning Jesus' future return: *“And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south”* (Zech. 14:4).

Until that day, the holy city of Jerusalem has been left desolate, and the house of Israel had been denounced and desecrated based upon her rejection of her long-awaited Messianic King. All of this is symbolically and prophetically depicted in Jesus' departure from the Temple, and its ultimate destruction at the hands of the Gentiles under Titus. The destruction of the Temple formed the locus of the discourse between the Master and his inquisitive disciples.

2. Its **Participants** – *“And his disciples came to him”* ... *“The disciples came unto him privately”*

Once Jesus publicly denounced and departed from the temple, His preaching ceased to be public and assumed a more private focus directed specifically and even secretly toward His disciples. Jesus personally portrays a fundamental principle, once persecution becomes public, preaching becomes private! As He ascended and seated Himself upon the Mount of Olives, His band of disciples came to Him. Scripture emphasizes the private nature of the Olivet Discourse by using the phrase, (Gk. *kat' idian* – “on their own,” “privately”)! The Latin Vulgate renders this phrase “secretly,” while the various English versions translate it “privately.” Jesus’ Olivet message marked a private discipleship discourse for His faithful followers. In fact, in his gospel record Mark stresses that those who personally approached Jesus with the two pertinent questions setting the historical occasion were the “BIG-4” of Peter, James, John, and Thomas – “*And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately*” (Mk.3:3). Jesus was about to share sacred priceless pearls of prophetic truth, and so He refused to cast these pearls before swine. Instead, He shared them with His devoted disciples who alone comprised the audience for the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24! Thus, while Jesus’ preaching commenced in public with the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7), it concluded in private with the Olivet Discourse (Mat. 24)!

3. Its **Place** – “*The buildings of the temple...All these things*” ...  
“*The Mount of Olives*”

Technically speaking Jesus’ Olivet Discourse started around the Temple complex inside the city of Jerusalem, and ended outside the city on the slopes of the Mount called Olivet. The disciple’s captivation and curiosity with Herod’s Temple prompted the entire episode, and paved the way for the single greatest prophetic message ever to come from the loving lips of the Lord Jesus.

Geographically speaking the Mount of Olives is a north-to-south ridge of hills east of Jerusalem. The summit of the Mount rises over 2500 feet and overlooks the area where Herod’s Temple was once situated. Upon this sacred site Jesus delivered his final discourse to His disciples, the Olivet Discourse. The Roman commander, Titus, nicknamed it “Mount Scopus,” meaning, “Lookout Hill” because of the advantageous view it provided over the entire city. In ancient times the Mount was densely canvased with Olive Groves. The people would have gathered their olive branches from this area during the time of Jesus’ Triumphal Entry. It was from this Mount that Jesus overlooked the city and wept (Lk. 19:41). In a Garden located on this Mount Jesus was also betrayed by Judas Iscariot and turned over to his enemies (Mt. 26:36; Mk. 14:32). From one of the high ridges of the Mount the disciples later observed Jesus as He ascended back into heaven (Ac. 1:11-12). In the final phase of God’s unfolding prophetic program Jesus will return and place His feet upon this very same literal geographical spot (Zech. 14:4). It must be

noted that if all previous events and activities in Jesus' life relative to the Mount of Olives were literal, physical, and historical; it seems only reasonable to assume that those events and activities yet to come with relationship to the Mount of Olives shall once again be literal, physical, and historical.

#### 4. Its **Prophetic Prelude** – *“There shall not be left here one stone upon another”*

The historical statement ultimately leading to the disciples' enquiry and the explanation set forth in Jesus' Olivet Discourse constitutes one of the most amazing prophecies ever uttered in Biblical history, and provides a prophetic prelude for the historical and literal interpretation of Jesus' entire Sermon. Looking upon the majestic Temple facility, Jesus directed his disciples to the grandeur of the granite edifice, and declared that the day was coming when not one single stone of the Temple proper would be left standing upon another stone. Jesus made this prophetic proclamation in 32 A.D. Some 38 years later, in August, 70 A.D. at the close of a four-year siege on the city of Jerusalem, the Romans set the Temple ablaze. As the Temple burned with fire it was reported to Titus that the gold of the Temple was melting and seeping down between the cracks of the great stones of the Temple. Titus ordered that the stones be pulled apart so that the gold could be dug out and removed from between the mortar-joints of the stones. This literally and historically resulted in every stone being pulled apart until not one stone remained upon another. Thus, the words of Jesus regarding the Temple complex were literally and historically fulfilled. This historical episode is reported by Flavius Josephus in his book, *“The Wars of the Jews”* (6.4).

**NOTE:** Since Jesus' prophecy concerning the destruction of the Temple was literally and historically fulfilled in 70 A.D., it provides a logical and theological prophetic prelude for treating Jesus' subsequent prophetic discourse literally and historically. Since the first part of the prophecy was literally and historically fulfilled in real space-time, it only seems logical that the final part of the prophecy will also be literally and historically fulfilled in real space-time.

#### 5. Its **Preventative Purpose** – *“Take heed that no man deceive you”*

The very presence of prophecy points to the ever-present perilous danger of deception. We live in a world dictated by the Deceiver, and dominated by deception. This is one of the reasons God employs the light of prophetic truth. Prophecy prepares God's people for God's program for this planet, and for the people who live on this planet. One of the primary purposes for prophetic preparation is to protect God's elect from the deception and delusion that permeates the whole of humanity. The ever-present deception is destined to increase more and more as God's prophetic program progresses upon this planet. Consequently, Jesus opens up His prophetic proclamation with an emphatic

imperative prohibiting deception. When it comes to God's prophetic program the Lord Jesus warns us to "STOP and BEHOLD" lest we be deceived. The word "deceive" (Gk. *planēsē*) is the word from which we derive our English term, "planet." A planet is a "wandering body" that endlessly roams in the blackness of outer-space. Jesus does not want His elect to "roam" and "wander" aimlessly through this life as if we were mindless masses of mere matter. He wants us to know who we are, where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going. Jesus wants us to know God's plan and program for the ages. This is the very point of prophecy. In His loving-kindness Jesus makes known to us the truth concerning the past, the present, and the proleptic. Why? Because He does not want us to be led astray by deception. The purpose of prophecy is to prepare us and to prevent us from falling into the deception which is to come upon the unsaved world. This is the purpose of all prophecy, and this is the purpose of Jesus' Olivet Discourse. He who heeds Jesus' prophetic discourse can and will defeat the delusion of demonic deception for which the non-elect are eternally destined.

## B. The Historical **SITUATION** of the Discourse – vs. 3b.

### 1. A twofold **Request**

- a. *"When shall these things be?"*
- b. *"What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"*

**NOTE:** It cannot be overstated that Jesus' Olivet Discourse is His personal prophetic reply to two specific questions posed by His disciples. As representatives of the apostolic band, Peter, James, John, and Thomas came to the Master with two specific questions. These two questions directly sprang from Jesus' personal prophecy regarding the future destruction of the Temple. In lieu of Jesus' words the disciples desired to know two things: 1) When would the Temple be destroyed? and 2) What sign would accompany the future return of the Messiah and the culmination of the ages and of the world which now is? These two things prompted Jesus's prophetic proclamation in the Olivet Discourse.

### 2. A twofold **Response**

- a. Jesus' answer to question one occurs in Lk. 21!
- b. Jesus' answer to question two occurs in Matt. 24 & Mk. 13!

**OBSERVATION:** It must be carefully and prayerfully observed that the two questions of the disciples, brought a two-fold answer from the Master. The two questions were actually two distinct and separate questions, and the two answers were two distinct and separate answers. The two questions cannot be blended without creating confusion, and the two answers cannot be blended without creating confusion. Jesus answers both of His disciple's questions in their

respective order. But it must also be observed that the Holy Spirit sovereignly chooses to record Jesus' response in a unique and distinguishable manner in and through the various inspired Synoptic Writers – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Gospel records show that Jesus' answer to question number one, regarding the destruction of the Temple, is recorded and revealed in the Gospel of Luke. The Lukan account concerns itself with the first question posed by the disciples. The Matthean and Markan records take up the second question posed by the disciples. Thus, when we read Jesus' Olivet Discourse as recorded in Matthew 24, we are not confronted with the same data as we find in Luke's report. This is due to the fact that the Holy Spirit providentially purposed to use Matthew to answer one question, while He chose to have Luke record Jesus' answer to another question. Those who fail to draw this divinely inspired, and providentially purposeful point of revelation often err in blending the two questions and their respective answers as if the past destruction of the Temple fulfilled the whole of the prophetic point in perspective in Jesus' prophetic discourse. This is simply not so. In many respects the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. provides a prophetic prelude to the coming perils which shall fall upon Jerusalem and the Jewish people, but the futuristic events of the final seven-year period mark the fuller, future, and final fulfillment of the consummation of the ages yet to come in answer to the disciples second and separate question concerning the end of the world that now is, and that world which is yet to come. This is borne out in the phrase "*of the end of the world*" (Gk. *tēs sunteleias tou aiōnos*) which occurs four other times in Matthew (13:39-40, 49; 28:20). In each case it speaks of the consummation of all things and the eschatological final judgment!