

**The Olivet Discourse Was Given by Our Lord to Inform The Jews When the Temple Would Be Destroyed AD 70 by the Romans and to Discuss Aspects of His Second Coming.**

# **OLIVET DISCOURSE PROPHECY**

**(Appendix C of my book: *Watchman Warning;*  
A Detailed Development and Analysis of the Olivet  
Discourse)**

**by  
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**The Olivet Discourse was given to warn the Jews of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans. Except for references to the Second Coming, the prophetic events became history as of AD 70. The Abomination of Desolation was implemented by the Romans. It has no reference to the endtimes Tribulation. The Cross set aside all future Jewish temples forever preventing one from coming that is of God - but might be from Satan. Thus, the Discourse gives no basis for a Jewish Tribulation and a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. The Rapture is Post-Tribulational at Christ's Second Coming.**

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Scriptures quoted are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

*See the glossary for definitions and understanding of the terms used.*

**Note:** This report is Appendix C of my book: *Watchman Warning* (1994). The details are summarized in my other book: *Watchman, How Far Gone is the Night?* (1995). We encourage you to read these books for more detail and breadth for greater background and more complete understanding. They are available by contacting the above.

This paper is written for those who have some knowledge of the issues and doctrines in prophecy. Those wanting a more beginning view can read *Watchman, How Far Gone is the Night?*

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2 Chronicles 16:9;  
Matthew 6:33; 1 John

# THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

(Detailed Development and Analysis of the  
Olivet Discourse - Appendix C of *Watchman  
Warning*)

by  
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## THE PROPHECY

Just before His Crucifixion, the Lord taught His disciples a prophecy about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, His coming again, and the end of the Church Age. This teaching occurred on the Mount of Olives, after He and His disciples had passed by the temple. Interpreters have called this sermon the Olivet Discourse. The Discourse and its related teachings are contained in many Scriptures: Matthew 10:16-23; 24:1-31; Mark 13:1-27; Luke 17:22-37; 19:41-44; 21:5-28; 23:27-31. The prophecy mentions a Great Tribulation that comes upon the Jews when Jerusalem and the temple are to be destroyed.

Interpreters hold different views about when the period of the temple and the Great Tribulation occurs. Some believe they both refer to the endtime Tribulation period, after the Church Age and just before Christ returns. Those who do, believe the Bible teaches a pretribulation Rapture because in their view, the temple represents a Jewish period. This requires the all-nations church to be raptured before the Jewish period begins.

Others believe the Great Tribulation refers to the time of the temple's destruction in A.D. 70. Those who do, believe that the Jewish periods are over after A.D. 70 and that the church remains on earth until Christ comes again at the end of the endtime Great Tribulation and the Church Age. These believers hold to a Posttribulation Rapture or a Preterist (historical) View of Revelation. Thus, the interpretation of the passage helps determine one's view when the Rapture will occur.

To avoid interpretive error, interpreters need to examine all three gospels simultaneously because they give parallel accounts of the Olivet prophecy. Harmonies of the gospels can be used for they present the gospel Scriptures chronologically, side by side, on the same page. Several are available<sup>1</sup> for different translations of the Bible.

The Discourse states that the Lord said the then-existing temple would be destroyed, with every stone torn down. His comments caused the disciples to raise questions about what He was saying as they reached the Mount. The Lord presents the Discourse in a manner to answer their questions.

**Their first two questions were**, When will these things be? What will be the sign when all these things are to be fulfilled? (The disciples were referring to when all the stones of the temple would be torn down.) These questions are found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

**Their third question was**, What will be the sign of Your coming and the end, or consummation, of the age? (They thought these two events would occur at the same time.) This question is found only in Matthew.

The Lord taught that the temple would be destroyed during a Great Tribulation. The Jews would know that the destruction was near when they saw armies surround Jerusalem and the temple. When they saw these armies arriving, the Jews were advised to flee to the mountains, told not to go into their houses, and warned not to return for a cloak if they were in the fields. They risked capture or death if they did not take immediate evasive action.

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The Lord also taught that He would come at the end of the age, after false christs and prophets came, giving great signs and wonders. He would come on the clouds, after the heavenly luminaries were darkened. The darkened luminaries are a sign of the Day of the Lord that would occur after the Great Tribulation, at the end of the Church Age. When He comes on the clouds with a trumpet sound, He and the angels will gather His elect from one end of heaven and earth to the other. This is the Resurrection and Rapture of the church. **He reminds the disciples that He has told them these things or signs, so that believers will not mistakenly accept false christs.**

**One major purpose for the Discourse** is to help believers know the truth about Christ's Coming and avoid being deceived by the misleading signs of false christs. There would be immediate precursory signs in the heavens followed by the true sign of His Coming on the clouds. They were not to be misled by the false signs of false christs and wonders. Christ tells His disciples to remember that the signs of His Coming are unique.

The prophecy signifies that the destruction of the Jewish temple in A.D. 70 and the following Great Tribulation were a disciplinary action against the Jews for rejecting Christ. The Great Tribulation associated with this action was a calamity as part of a Day-of-the-Lord judgment that was associated with the Jewish Pattern Sequence. These events were also confirming signs that the Jews' covenant relationship with God had been terminated at the Cross.

The Discourse teaches that the Rapture of the church and the final judgments on unbelievers occur at Christ's Second Coming, at the end of the Church age. It teaches that there will be general signs throughout the Church Age which are not signs of His Coming. When He does come, He will come with little warning and with specific precursory signs. This passage requires much discussion because its interpretation bears on the Rapture's timing.

## DISCUSSION

The wording in the Discourse concerning the "Great Tribulation" has brought confusion to interpreters. The teaching in Matthew 24:29 that Christ comes immediately **after the tribulation of those days** has led many to believe that this Scripture refers to the Great Tribulation of Matthew 24:21. Thus, the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24:21 must refer to the Great Tribulation in Revelation 7:14 because it occurs near to the Coming of Christ, instead of to the destruction of the temple and distress to the Jews. They are thought to be one and the same tribulation because only one tribulation by the word tribulation is mentioned in the Discourse. Thus, they believe that the "Great Tribulation" cannot refer to Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70. The Great Tribulation is also thought to be the endtime Tribulation because of the wording in verse 21.

*Matthew 24:21 - for then there will be a Great Tribulation, such as has not occurred from the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.*

Because the Discourse states that this tribulation contains the worst conditions ever, interpreters have thought it must refer to the last Tribulation, near Christ's Coming. However, verse 21 contains an idiom — "*such as has not occurred from the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall*" — that God uses to describe tribulation **every time** He brings severe Day-of-the-Lord calamity on His people. A similar expression is used several times in the Old Testament as God brought several Day-of-the-Lord judgments (Isaiah 7:17-19, 21-25; Jeremiah 51:25; Ezekiel 5:1-17; Daniel 9:12; 12:1; Joel 2:1-7; 2:2; Matthew 24:21). Note the following Scripture:

*Ezekiel 5:9 - And because of your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again.*

In the case of the Discourse, the calamity comes in A.D. 70 by means of the Roman armies. They are called "the abomination of desolation" (Matthew 24:15) that brought "the mentioned Great Tribulation" (Matthew 24:21) to the Jews and Jerusalem to destroy the temple and the city. This is the same reference and meaning in Daniel 9:27. "The tribulation of those days" (Matthew 24:29) is the Great Tribulation that incorporates the false signs and false christs and occurs near the time of Christ's Coming; it is the endtime Great Tribulation of Revelation 7:14. **Thus, there are two Great Tribulations in the passage; one is specifically stated and the other one implied.**

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This understanding fits the disciples' questions about the temple's destruction, Christ's Second Coming, and the end of the age. **The alternative interpretation that the temple and Tribulation (Matthew 24:15-21) are future cannot be correct because it leaves the disciples' question about the destruction of the existing temple unanswered. Answering the question is one main reason for the Discourse.**

### ANALYSIS OF THE DISCOURSE

#### The Lord Answers the First Two Questions

**When will these things be? What will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled? (When will the existing temple be destroyed?)**

The Lord takes the disciples over the period that precedes Jerusalem's destruction as follows:

1. *"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many" (Matthew 24:5).*
2. *"And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for these things must take place, but that is not yet the end" (Matthew 24:6).*
3. *"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes" (Matthew 24:7).*
4. *"There will be terrors and great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:11).*

The terrors and signs in heaven and the sky are precursors to the Day-of-the-Lord judgment that God brought on Jerusalem, the temple, and surrounding nations in A.D. 70. During this period, *"... the people will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'" and to the hills, 'Cover us'" (Luke 23:30).* These idioms refer to the calamity coming on God's people in the Day of the Lord. Regarding this period, the Lord said, *"For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed'" (Luke 23:29).*

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

The Bible uses the term "birth pangs" to represent judgment that comes suddenly that cannot be stopped.

Christ told His disciples about several things that would happen to them **before** the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple occurred:

1. *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name" (Matthew 24:9). "But be on your guard; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them" (Mark 13:9). Acts tells us that these things happened to Peter, Paul, and their associates (Acts 7:54-60; 8:1-4; 12:1-4; 14:19; 16:19-34; 25; 26).*
2. *"And when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit ... " (Mark 13:11).*
3. *"And at that time many will fall away [from the faith] and will betray one another and hate one another" (Matthew 24:10). "But you will be betrayed by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death ..." (Luke 21:16).*
4. *"And many false prophets will arise and will mislead many" (Matthew 24:11).*
5. *"And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). Most will fall away from active, obedient faith, to apathetic apostasy.*

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6. *"But the one who endures to the end [keeps the faith], it is he who shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). The one who endures will develop greater maturity; no one is ever saved to eternal life by works or actions.*
7. *"And this gospel of the kingdom [another name for Christ's gospel and obedience to God's Kingdom reign] shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come" (Matthew 24:14). The "end" here refers to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. **Acts 2:5, Romans 1:8, and Colossians 1:6 teach that the gospel went to all nations before the temple was destroyed, since these Bible books were written before A.D. 70.***

These signs occurred as precursory ones, before the judgment came on Jerusalem and the temple's stones were torn down in A.D. 70.<sup>2</sup> A similar set of signs is found in Matthew 10:16-23. Signs occur, not only in the period preceding the temple's destruction, but also in the periods prior to Christ's Coming.

*Matthew 10:23 - "But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes."*

The Lord now answers the disciples' questions about what will happen when Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed. He first tells them the sign of their destruction. Then He tells the disciples there will be Great Tribulation for them.

1. The sign of imminent destruction, or desolation, will be when the abomination of desolation, or the Roman army, stands in the holy place. This is when the armies surround Jerusalem. This was spoken of through Daniel, the prophet. The Bible says, *"Let the reader understand."*

The holy place can be Jerusalem because it is often called the holy mountain (place) or city, such as in Daniel 9:16 and Matthew 27:53. The Greek word used for "place" is topos which means a place, position, or region. It carries the meaning of general location. It is used that way throughout the New Testament. The word "place" need not refer to a special place, such as the holy of holies or the temple. The word can easily apply to the city of Jerusalem, as it does in John 4:20.

Later in this same passage, the Bible warns people that when they see this sign, they should flee the area in haste. Most people could not see inside the temple or inside the city walls. Thus, the abomination of desolation could not refer to any sacrifice or activity inside the temple or the city. **Most people could only "key off" the presence of the Roman army in order to leave the area in haste.** Also, the abomination of desolation could not possibly be a false sacrifice because the Roman army would have to come through the walls and capture Jerusalem first, before such a sacrifice could be made. At that time, it would be too late to flee. The Jews would have to flee before the battle begins, before Jerusalem and the temple are totally surrounded.

*Luke 21:20 - "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand."*

Daniel gives the same answer:

*Daniel 9:26 - ... and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations will be determined.*

Our Lord appears to quote the Septuagint version of Daniel 9:27 (and Daniel 12:11) in Matthew 24:15, where He refers to the abomination of desolation, or the Roman armies (Luke 21:20), when Jerusalem is destroyed in A.D. 70.

*Daniel 9:27 (Septuagint) - "And one week shall establish the covenant with the many; and in the midst of the week My sacrifice and drink offering shall be taken away; and upon the temple shall be the abomination of desolations; and at the end of the time an end shall be put to the desolation."*

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The Lord also speaks of this period earlier in His ministry:

*Luke 19:43, 44 - "For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."*

It is the abomination of desolation that brings destruction to the temple and Jerusalem. This is determined from comparing Matthew and Mark with Luke concerning this Discourse. Matthew and Mark use the term abomination of desolation, where as Luke uses armies. The description "abomination of desolation" fits the Roman army. Josephus states that the ensigns of eagles and the emperor that the armies carried were an abomination to the Jews.<sup>3</sup> The Romans did bring their ensigns to the temple, and once there, they did offer sacrifices to them.<sup>4</sup> This may be the very reason Christ calls the Roman army "the abomination of desolation."

The conclusion is that the holy place is the city of Jerusalem and that the abomination of desolation is the Roman army and their ensigns.

2. *For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall (Matthew 24:21).*

The Roman armies came because these were Days of God's Vengeance on the Jews who rejected Christ and had Him crucified (Isaiah 61:2; Luke 21:22). The "Days of Vengeance," another name for the Day of the Lord, came as a judgment on God's people, the Jews. The Days of Vengeance came as a period of Great Tribulation when God brought calamity on the Jews for their apostasy and rejection of Christ. God calls it a period of great distress upon the land and wrath on His people. Most of the Jews probably died.

The Bible presents an expression that describes a terrible future by stating that there was never a time like it and there would never be again. **This terminology is what God uses every time He brings calamity-judgment against His people.**

This tribulation in the Discourse cannot happen after A.D. 70 because God no longer uses physical temples after the Cross, when He rent the temple's veil. After the Day of Pentecost, the sanctuary, or temple, is Christ's church (Ephesians 2:19-22). He will not build another temple in which sacrifices are offered because this would once again bring shame to His Son (Hebrews 6:6).

3. The Jews were to pray that the Days of Vengeance would not occur on a Sabbath or in winter and that a mother would not be nursing an infant baby during these days. When the Days of Vengeance came, many would die by the sword; others would be led captive to all the nations. These happenings are typical when God brings discipline on His people for their apostasy.

On the Sabbath, the Jewish armies would be less alert, and the Jewish traditions would limit their activity. It would be like attacking the United States early on Sunday morning. Because the Sabbath relates to the Jewish economy, which God has set aside, the Days of Vengeance cannot occur after Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. They actually occurred when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70.

4. Unless the Lord had shortened the number of days the Roman army attacked, no one would have remained alive. He shortened them for the elect's sake.

*Matthew 24:22 - "And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved, but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short."*

According to Josephus, the war against Jerusalem began about August of A.D. 66, when the Roman commander, Cestius Gallus, invaded Palestine with his armies.<sup>5</sup> He surrounded Jerusalem, began the assault, and was successful in his efforts to the point that the Jews were about to surrender. Then suddenly, without reason, he withdrew his armies from Jerusalem and departed. This withdrawal encouraged the Jews to pursue the Romans and inflict losses on them.

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About three years later, after the withdrawal of the Roman armies under Cestius Gallus, Josephus states that Vespasian became emperor of Rome. He sent his son, Titus, with two more legions or armies from Egypt, to Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> These armies brought Jerusalem's destruction when most died in A.D. 70. A great number died because Jerusalem was filled with Passover visitors. The total time from A.D. 66 was about three and one-half years.

Because of God's warning earlier through Christ, the Christian Jews knew the armies would return. The interlude gave the Jews time to recover and the freedom to flee Jerusalem and the area to the mountains, when they saw the return of the armies. They probably fled quickly because the instructions from God state that they would not have much time to escape. This allowed them to escape the devastation that followed.

5. From that time onward, *"Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"* (Luke 21:24).

The *"times of the Gentiles"* refers to the period when the Gentiles rule over Jerusalem and when Israel is without covenant relationship to God. Their times run until the final judgments occur, when Christ comes again. Israel is currently in the land without a covenant with God. The Arab mosque on the temple site and their apostate circumstances prevent the Jews from rebuilding any temple. In effect, the Gentiles and unbelievers reign religiously in Israel. Revelation 11:3-13 shows that Israel will be under the reign of the Beast during the Great Tribulation. The times of the Gentiles includes the Great Tribulation because a large number of Gentiles die in this period. The trampling down of Jerusalem shows that the Jews, as a covenant nation, will not be returned to God. Jerusalem (the Jews) will be out of fellowship with God, as a covenant nation, until the Rapture and the final judgments. The Jews in a covenant nation relationship will never again be restored. The teaching, "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," is not mentioned as deliverance, or the Rapture, in the Olivet Discourse because, according to Romans 11:25, the deliverance was held as a mystery until after the Day of Pentecost.

### The Lord Answers the Third Question

#### What will be the sign of your coming and the consummation of the age?

Christ told His disciples that there would be true and false signs of His Coming. The signs that occur before His Coming are set off by the word "then," in Matthew 24:23. Just as the Lord gave many signs that occurred over many years as precursors to Jerusalem's destruction, He also gives precursory signs that occur over many years before His Second Coming.

The major signs and teachings preceding Christ's Second Coming are as follows, listed in the order of the Scriptures:

1. *"And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ;' or 'Behold, He is there;' do not believe him"* (Mark 13:21).
2. *"For false christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray"* (Mark 13:22). This is exactly what happens in the Great Tribulation, just before Christ's Second Coming (2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10; Revelation 13:13-15).
3. Christ tells us, *"Behold I have told everything in advance"* (Mark 13:23).
4. *"If therefore they say to you, 'Behold He is in the wilderness,' do not go forth, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them"* (Matthew 24:26).
5. Christ will not come under the above conditions; instead, He comes as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west. The vultures gather wherever there are corpses. This latter phrase refers to judgment — when people die at His Coming. (Mark 13:24-27.)

The Lord first gave background about His Coming as the Son of Man (Luke 17:22-24). He confirms, *"And they will say to you, 'Look there! Look here! Do not go away, and do not run after them."* He also gives a similar description to that in item 5 above: lightning will flash just before He comes.

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The Luke passage confirms that these signs are for the period just before Christ comes to bring judgment. They are not signs of the Tribulation of Matthew 24:21 that brought Jerusalem's destruction.

Just as He told the disciples not to be misled by the precursory signs of Jerusalem's destruction, He also tells them not to be misled by these signs as the ones of His Coming. He tells us that He has told us in advance. Thus, we should take notice.

Christ now tells His disciples that the signs which immediately precede His Coming and "the sign of His Coming," answers their question. The signs that immediately precede His coming are:

*Matthew 24:29 - "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,"*

*Luke 21:25, 26 - "And there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."*

These Scriptures raise the question: To what tribulation does the Bible refer? Does it refer to the Tribulation of A.D. 70, or does it refer to the endtime Tribulation under the Man of Lawlessness? The words of Matthew 24:29, "*But immediately after the tribulation of those days,*" have led some to believe that both the Great Tribulation of Matthew 24:21, at the time of A.D. 70, and the Tribulation of Matthew 24:29 were actually the same and final Tribulation under the Antichrist, or Man of Lawlessness, at the end of the Church Age. Many interpreters believe this because it appears that the verses that follow refer to Christ's Second Coming. If the tribulation of verse 29 refers to the tribulation of verse 21, then the Matthew 24:21 tribulation must be the one at the end of the Church Age. This conclusion would leave the passage without any discussion of the temple's destruction. Such a discussion is required by the passage's context and the disciples' question. The destruction of the existing temple is a main teaching of the passage. This is shown by the words "*not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.*"

Because the holy place (thought by some to be the temple) and Sabbath show that the Great Tribulation in verse 21 is a Jewish period, and because many equate the two tribulations (verses 21 and 29), many believe the period just before Christ's Return must also be Jewish in character. The reference in the passage to "*the abomination of desolation*" and to Daniel has reinforced this belief that the future Tribulation may be the time of Daniel's 70th Week. This interpretation allows the all-nations church to be raptured before this Jewish Great Tribulation begins; thus, the Rapture is thought to be pretribulational.

The dilemma is resolved when it is realized that the Great Tribulation in verse 21 occurs in A.D. 70, and the one in verse 29 occurs when Christ returns. "*The tribulation of those days*" is not the tribulation of Matthew 24:21. Instead it is the Great Tribulation of Revelation 7:14, which happens under the Man of Lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12), who is the Beast out of the sea (Revelation 13). It is the time when the Discourse refers to false christs who will bring signs and wonders.

**Thus, the Olivet Discourse contains two Great Tribulations: one in A.D. 70, when the temple was destroyed, and another, just before the Lord comes at the end of the age.**

The tribulation of Matthew 24:21 refers to the one of A.D. 70. This tribulation brought the horrible destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Roman armies as the abomination of desolation.

The "*tribulation of those days,*" that occurs just before the signs in the heavens and the Second Coming of Christ, is the Great Tribulation of Revelation 7:14. This Tribulation experienced by Christians results from an attack by Satan's Beast and False Prophet. The attack is an attempt to rid his Kingdom of Christians. Thus, most will be martyred.

There are two Great Tribulations in the Discourse, for the following reasons:

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1. The sun, moon, and stars lose their light in three occurrences after the Day of Pentecost. All three are Days of the Lord. The first is recorded in Acts 2:20 and the second in Revelation 6:12, 13. The third one is here in the Olivet Discourse.

Acts 2:20 refers to the Great Tribulation judgment on the Jews in A.D. 70 while Revelation 6:12, 13 speaks of an endtime judgment on the church and the world, before the final Great Tribulation. This latter one is announced by the events of the sixth seal. The one in A.D. 70 is the same event as the "*Days of Vengeance*" in Luke 21:22. The Olivet Discourse passage (Matthew 24:29) describes the Day of the Lord that God brings on all the nations after the Great Tribulation (same period as Revelation 16:17-21), when Christ comes again. This latter account is distinct from the other two; the moon is blackened in this passage but is turned to a blood color in the other two. In the first two, Christ does not come and the world continues on its course. But He does come in the last one of Matthew 24:29 and the world ends. Thus, the tribulation of verse 29 is the Great Tribulation of Revelation 7:14.

2. The passage's context and sequence deal with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and Christ's Coming because they relate to the disciples' questions. Matthew 24:15-22 deals with the destruction of the city and temple, but this passage does not deal with the endtime Tribulation. Because the tribulation of verse 29 is connected to Christ's Coming, it is a different tribulation and does not refer to the one in verse 21. Instead, it deals with the Tribulation of Revelation 7:14.

A belief that verse 21 refers to the endtime Great Tribulation leaves the passage without a discussion of the temple's destruction in A.D. 70 which is required by the disciples' questions. Interpreters avoid this problem by assuming that the Luke passage is not an exact parallel account with the other gospels, and that it alone speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies (Luke 21:20-24). However, a comparison of the three gospels shows they are parallel. The Bible gives no authorization to consider them otherwise.

3. The main portion of the Church Period occurs between the two tribulations. The Church Period is referenced in Luke 21:24, when "*Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*" The fulfillment occurs at the end of the Church Period, when the judgment comes upon the nations. The Church Period also occurs in Matthew 24:23-28 and in Mark 13:21-23 without being directly referenced. Prior to the Day of Pentecost, it is not directly mentioned in Scripture because the Church Period is considered a mystery (Ephesians 1:9, 10).
4. The verses that refer to the Tribulation at the Second Coming do not refer to A.D. 70 because the signs in the sky appear to be seen by the entire globe as opposed to only people in the land of Israel.

*Luke 21:25, 26 - "And there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the seas and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens have been shaken."*

The details of the Church Period are held as a mystery until after the Day of Pentecost (Ephesians 1:9, 10). Thus, the Church Period can be in the Olivet Discourse passage in intent, but not directly referenced. The expression, "*But immediately after the tribulation of those days,*" could refer to the Tribulation that occurs at the end of the Church Age, even though the Church Age was not mentioned, because of the mystery.

After giving precursory signs, the Lord tells the disciples of the single sign of His Coming and of the consummation of the age.

*Matthew 24:30, 31 - "and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with great power and glory. 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."*

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The sign of the Lord's Coming and the consummation of the age is His Coming with, or on, clouds. This is exactly the way we are told He will return in Acts 1:9-11. The expectation in the Acts 1 passage is that the disciples, or the believers who follow after them, will be on the earth until He comes. They will see false christs in the meantime, who are not signs of His Coming; these signs of false christs are not to be believed. Believers are not to believe Christ's Coming until they see Him coming on the clouds, after the signs in the heavens occur. Then people can know that their redemption is drawing near (Luke 21:28). From 2 Thessalonians 2, people can know Christ will not come until after the Man of Lawlessness is revealed and calls himself god.

When Christ comes, He will gather His elect together from wherever they are in heaven and on earth. This is a general expression for the return of the saints to Himself and, in the Old Testament, for a return to the land after a period of divine discipline. At the end of the Church Age, this would be the Rapture and Resurrection of the church. This will be the only time He gathers His elect together from both heaven and earth.

*Mark 13:27 - "And then He will send forth His angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth, to the farthest end of heaven."*

Another Scripture teaches that the Lord gathers His elect from everywhere when He comes with clouds:

*1 Thessalonians 4:17 - Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [the dead in Christ] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

This is the time of the Rapture, when all the elect, or saints, will be gathered from one end of the earth to the other and from one end of heaven to the other, to be with Christ at the trumpet's sounding. Christ also collects the elect in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 with the trumpet. This event is followed by the Day of the Lord, as a judgment on unbelievers at the end of the age (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11). This passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11 is in perfect harmony with the meaning of the Olivet Discourse passage, when the Lord returns on clouds with the trumpet sound, collects the elect, and brings judgment. He gathers the elect with the last and seventh trumpet in Revelation 11.

*Revelation 1:7 - "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him," says the Lord God.*

These verses teach that every person, both believer and unbeliever, will see Christ when He comes with clouds. This is confirmed when the Lord, at His trial, told the high priest that he would see Him at the judgment time, when He came in clouds, sitting at the right hand of Power.

*Matthew 26:64 - Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

**When Christ comes, He will reward believers and punish unbelievers.** In summary, expectations are that:

1. Believers will be on earth during the endtime Great Tribulation.
2. When Christ comes, He will rapture His church and bring judgment on unbelievers.
3. Christ will not come back until after the Great Tribulation because the sign of His Coming occurs at that time.

This is verified by the following Scripture that occurs after the Little Horn reigns on earth and after he persecutes the saints during the Great Tribulation:

*Daniel 7:13 - "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like the Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of*

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*every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."*

By reference to Daniel 7:27, people can know that the Son of Man comes in clouds, after the Little Horn makes war against the saints in the divine discipline period. Christ comes when the nations of the world become His Kingdom. This is exactly what happens at the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15, when Christ rewards His church and judges unbelievers at the end of the mark-of-the-Beast period. He comes after the tribulation of those days.

*Daniel 7:27 - 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'*

The preceding passage teaches that after the Tribulation, Christ sets up **an everlasting** kingdom — not a 1000 year kingdom. This implies that eternity follows His Coming — not a Millennium.

The "then" in Matthew 24:23 sets off the Great Tribulation from the previous part of the passage. This is when the Little Horn makes war against the saints for three and one-half years.

These passages refer to and harmonize with the teaching that Christ comes at the end of the age, with clouds and a trumpet sound, to collect His elect and to bring judgment on the unbelievers. His Coming is preceded by signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and the shaking of the powers in the heavens. These passages also harmonize with:

*Jude 1:14, 15 - And about these [unbelievers] also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold the Lord came with many thousands of His Holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."*

*1 Thessalonians 3:13 - so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints [holy ones].*

The Bible does not identify whether the holy ones in these verses are the elect angels or elect people. He appears to bring both. The angels are clearly meant in Matthew 16:27, 24:31, Mark 8:38, Luke 9:26, and 2 Thessalonians 1:7. From Revelation 19 He appears to bring the church. When Christ comes from heaven to bring judgment, the Bible says that His armies, following Him on white horses, are clothed in fine linen, white and clean (Revelation 19:14). It also states that the church is clothed in fine linen, bright, and clean (Revelation 19:8). Thus, when Christ comes in judgment, He comes with His people, or saints, as His armies.

The overall concept is that Christ uses His angels to gather the elect together for rewards. After their gathering, He uses them as His armies to make war against unbelievers and punish them for their deeds, as He rules with a rod of iron. Thus, He comes with both the angels and the church after the mark-of-the-Beast period.

## THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

The parable of the fig tree is part of the Olivet Discourse and teaches the same sequence and flow as does the main discourse (Matthew 24:32-36). It began with Jerusalem's destruction and jumps to the Lord's Return. The parable of the fig tree is to be learned because it gives an object lesson in observing signs. When the fig tree puts forth its leaves, people can know that summer is near. Similarly, people can tell that the Son of Man will be coming soon by observing the signs given in the earlier portion of the Olivet Discourse. The signs for the Lord's Return include days like those of Noah and Lot.

*Matthew 24:34 - "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."*

The Greek word for "generation," in verse 34, is *genea* which can mean clan, race, kind, nation, generation, and contemporaries. Its usage in Scripture is to mean generations, such as used in

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Christ's genealogies and references to the generation of that day. Therefore, "this generation" refers to people living at the time the parable was given. The passage teaches that all signs that occur before the temple's destruction will occur before all the people then living have died. The Greek word *de* for "but," in verse 36, brings a transition from the time of Jerusalem's destruction to Christ's Coming. It is the same type of transition as the word "then," in verse 23, discussed above.

*Matthew 24:36, 37 - But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the Coming of the Son of man will be just like the days of Noah.*

### SUMMARY

The Olivet Discourse deals with two sets of issues, or questions. They are (1) the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and (2) Christ's Coming at the consummation of the Church Age.

The Discourse teaches that there are general signs which would occur over the time periods before these events. Believers are to know them so they will not be misled. There are two Great Tribulations mentioned in the passage. One occurs in A.D. 70, when the temple was destroyed; the other occurs just before the Lord comes, at the end of the age. The passage declares the one at A.D. 70 for the destruction of Jerusalem. The signs of the false Christs and prophets and signs and wonders describe the endtime Great Tribulation (of those days). The mystery period of the Church Age is the interval between the two tribulations.

The Olivet Discourse implies that believers (the church) will be on the earth when Christ returns. They will experience the false Christs and the endtime Great Tribulation. Thus, it teaches that the Rapture is posttribulational.

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### ENDNOTES

1. Several harmonies of the life of Christ are available, including: 1) A Harmony of the Gospels (New American Standard Bible) by Robert L. Stanley and Stanley N. Gundry, 2) A Harmony of the Gospels For Students of the Life of Christ (Revised Standard Version Bible) by A. T. Robertson, and 3) Baker's Harmony of the Gospels (King James Version) by Benjamin Davies. Readers are encouraged to consult these resources.
2. There are some who may say that the stones of the temple were not all torn down in A.D. 70 because much of the temple's walls still stand to this day. Thus, the destruction of the temple stated in the passage cannot refer to the Jewish temple destroyed in A.D. 70. However, the Lord's words in the Olivet Discourse refer to the buildings of the temple and probably not to the walls. Note the Scripture:

*Mark 13:2 - And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one of these stones shall be left one upon another which will not be torn down."*

Luke 21:5, 6 also refer to the same building. In other words, the prophecy of the stones being torn down refer to the buildings and not necessarily to the complete destruction of the walls. Because of this there is no basis that the destruction of the temple can refer to any temple except to the one that was destroyed in A.D. 70. The Olivet Discourse Scriptures do not refer to a future temple.

3. Josephus, Complete Works, The Wars of the Jews, Book XVIII.
4. Josephus, Complete Works, The Wars of the Jews, Book VI, Chapter VI.
5. Josephus, Complete Works, The Wars of the Jews, Book II, Chapters XV-XIX.
6. Josephus, Complete Works, The Wars of the Jews, Book III, Chapter 1:1-3; Book IV, Chapters 9-11.