

ISRAEL THE CENTER OF THE WORLD IN THE CENTER OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

THE PROPHETIC DISCOURSE ON OLIVET (PART 1)

(Matthew 24, 25, Mark 13 and Luke 21)

In Matthew 24:1, we read, "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple". This was a symbolic act and really sealed the doom of the Temple, for He then declared concerning it, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down". As all know, this was quite miraculously fulfilled by soldiers of the Roman Empire at the time when Jerusalem was taken in A.D. 70. Our Lord's prediction on this subject was as positive as words could make it and it was fulfilled to the very letter 37 years later.

The Olivet Discourse forms one of the most important prophecies in the Bible. It was uttered in response to the three leading questions put to Him by His disciples: "And as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when these things shall be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world (Lit. age)?"

The Greek words translated "the end of the world" should have been translated "the consummation of the age", as given in the Revised Version Margin. The first of these questions clearly refers to our Lord's remark as to the destruction of the Temple and it is this aspect which Luke is caused to feature through his account of our Lord's utterance. Matthew and Mark both exclude the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and are caused to frame their accounts with the focus on our Lord's return and the period called "the consummation of the age" in which it takes place.

In a more literal sense, the Olivet Discourse as recorded by Matthew and Mark delineates the course of events, as affecting the world in general and Israel in particular, during the last seven years of the age. The seven years covered by the ministries of John the Baptist and Himself (A.D.26-33) had failed to bring in the Kingdom and our Lord knew that God for this reason intended to cancel the period chronologically, with the purpose of bringing it in again as a period of retributive judgment after the Christian Dispensation had ended with His Second Appearing, as described in I Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Matthew 24:4-8 refers to the first half of the coming seven years of judgment. This period our Lord ominously defines as “the beginning of sorrows”. Verses 9-14 lead up to the end of the second half of these seven years and apply strictly to the Jewish people. In verses 15-31, Matthew refers again to the second half of seven years but with much more detail. This begins with the words, “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place”. This is to the setting up of an idol in the rebuilt Temple at Jerusalem at the opening of the 42 months of Antichrist (see Revelation 13).

In verse 21 our Lord defines these 42 months as the period of the “great tribulation” and adds concerning it, “such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be”. These are words of limitless solemnity to all mankind and our Lord makes it clear that unless this judgment period was shortened “there should no flesh be saved”.

In verses 29 and 30 we are informed that our Lord’s Appearing “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” will take place “immediately after the tribulation of those days”. In the face of our Lord’s clear teaching as to His Advent in power and glory it is utterly unreasonable to invest the occasion with uncertainty as to its time when He Himself declares that He will come “immediately after the tribulation” – a period of time which will have unmistakable markings. This appearing, however, must not be confused with His Second Appearing, when He comes to assemble the Church which is His body, in the manner set forth by the Apostle Paul in the First Thessalonians’ Epistle (4:13-18) and also John 14:2,3 and Hebrews 9:28. The time of this Second Appearing is much concealed and this with the object of keeping the Church on the alert lest it should lapse into saying, like the wicked servant, “My lord delays his coming” (Matt.24:48). (Matt. 24:48).

THE THREE PARABLES OF MATTHEW 25

The Parable of the Ten Virgins embraces the whole Christian Profession and the preparedness of individuals within it for the Lord’s Second Appearing when He comes as the Bridegroom. At a time when Christians of every class are asleep to the fact of the Bridegroom’s imminent approach, a shrill Cry will be sounded

announcing the Event. This will awaken all from their dishonoring slumbers and everyone will be looking to the state of his or her lamp of profession. Those who have the “oil”, which is a type of the Holy Spirit, will be ready for the Bridegroom and go in with Him to the Marriage. This parable deals with **individual preparedness for our Lord’s Second Advent.**

In the Parable of the Ten Talents, faithfulness in service to our absent Lord is in question. Our Lord has bestowed on one and another gifts - “His goods” – according to His sovereign choice. Faithfulness, inspired by devotion to the absent Lord, marks those who receive the five talents and the two talents, the one who receives one talent, refuses to trade with the gift in a way calculated to benefit the one who bestowed it. He typifies those who profess to be servants of Christ but who in fact have no true knowledge of Him.

The Parable of Matthew 25 is that of the Sheep and Goats. It is prophetic of the occasion when our Lord sets up His Throne on the earth, following His return in power and glory. This parable envisages the Great Assize of the Nations, for we read in verses 31 and 32: “Then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divide his sheep from the goats”.

The nations typified by the “sheep” qualify for a welcome into our Lord’s Kingdom and to them He says, “Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (verse 34). Contrariwise, to those nations typified by the goats our Lord says, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (verse 41).

The supreme test in both cases is the treatment meted out by the respective nations towards those whom the Lord calls “My brethren”. **We must draw the attention to the essential objective of this parable, which is to establish the conditions under which a nation may qualify for entry into the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.** After the Christian Dispensation has ended by the Second Appearing of our Lord for His Church, which will be translated from the earth, our Lord authorizes a Remnant of the Jews, to go forth and preach what He terms “the gospel of the kingdom” to all the nations. Let the words of Matthew 24: 14

be carefully noted: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the entire world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come”.

The Gospel of the Kingdom, which was preached in the seven years, A.D. 26-33, first by John the Baptist, and then by our Lord and His disciples (Matthew 9:35 and 10:7), is to be again preached by Jewish disciples “ for a witness unto all nations”. The question of the salvation of the individual does not come into it at all. The “My Brethren” of the Parable are these Jewish disciples who will go forth into all the earth proclaiming amidst awful outpourings of judgment, the Coming of Christ as King.

Many Scriptures reveal that these Jewish disciples will become the object of outrageous assaults by the openly anti-Christian nations. Other nations (i.e. the “sheep” will receive these Jewish messengers and be friend them; and their actions in so doing will be accepted by our Lord as if done to Himself; for to them He says, “inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it into Me” (verse 40, cf. Acts 9:4).