

Lamar E. Cooper, Sr.  
Executive Vice President & Provost  
Criswell College

## **Tuesday: Day of Admonition**

### **Jesus' Olivet Discourse**

**Matthew 24:1-25:46**

#### **Introduction**

There are eighteen events that are recorded on Tuesday of Jesus' last days before His crucifixion, see Study Guide. Each one of them has an important lesson, but none is more important than Jesus' last major message to His disciples about the last days of human history. This is a passage that has suffered at the hands of interpreters and sensationalists, including many preachers. One of the main problems of interpretation is the temptation to apply the events and signs of this chapter to the church, rather than to Israel. It is crystal clear when you look at the text of Matthew 24:1-51 that it indeed is about Israel. Dr. W. A. Criswell used to say, "If you want to know what time it is [on the prophetic scale], look at Israel!"

Jesus' message in Matthew 24 is called the Olivet Discourse, because He sat down with them on the Mount of Olives, Matt 24:1-3. The message was given to His disciples in response to their question about the signs of the end and of His Second Coming. With all the talk about Jesus' departure, they wanted to know what would be the sign of His return, of Jesus' Second Coming to the earth. Since the time of the disciples' question of Matthew 24:3, the church has sought to know the "signs" of His Second Coming. Interpreters have tried to summarize the details of Jesus' return based on the facts given in this discourse. In order to understand what Jesus said to His disciples, we must remember that all of the signs relate to Israel. Here are the main points of the message Jesus gave them.

#### **1. The Jewish Dilemma: Who is the Messiah? 24:4-5**

- The national messiah option is still held by some Jews who believe that the nation of Israel is the Suffering Servant of Isa 52:13-53:12.
- Others believe that the Suffering Servant of Isaiah was perhaps Isaiah himself or an unknown prophet hold the Old Testament prophet option.
- The Chabad Lubavitcher, a Jewish sect, elected Manachem Schneerson as their messiah but he died in 1994. They predicted He would rise on the third day, but of course, he has not risen.
- The biblical is option affirmed by Messianic Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah; one day all Jews will adopt this view, Rom 9-11.
- There are many issues about the person of Christ that have been matters of debate, but the church has never had a question about whether or not Jesus is the Messiah.

## 2. The Constant Threat of War for Israel, 24:6-7a

- Since 1948 when modern Israel was reinstated in the land, there has been the constant threat of and sporadic outbreak of war. The following includes six major military engagements including the war for independence in 1948:
- 1948 war for independence
- 1956 Sinai Campaign, Gaza captured
- 1967 Six Day War
- 1973 Yom Kippur War
- 1982 Peace Zone in Lebanon
- 2004 Lebanon
- Wars have regularly punctuated human history. But, since 1948 Israel has been constantly under siege by the Palestinians and the Arab and Islamic states.

## 3. The Proliferation of Cataclysm and Disaster, 24:7b-8

- Famine - Famine affects over 852 million people annually worldwide. Each year 6 million children die from hunger. Since 1950 famine has affected all continents on the globe and virtually every nation: China, Cambodia, Bengal, Ethiopia, N. Korea, Malawi, Somalia, Chad, Sudan, Kenya, Darfur, Zimbabwe, the nations of Europe, United States, and Russia, to name a few.
- Pestilence - World epidemics include aids, tuberculosis, smallpox, diabetes, Ebola virus, SARS, avian influenza, etc. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified 39 potent new diseases that were unknown a generation ago. The WHO also warns that potent new antibiotic resistant strains of all existing diseases are on the rise.
- Earthquakes - From January 1 to January 22, 2008, there have been 418 earthquakes reported worldwide. Of these quakes 392 were 3.0 or better on the Richter scale. The US Geological Service in Denver includes a disclaimer that the list is incomplete as in some cases it takes several months to gather accurate data worldwide.
- Beginning of Sorrows - The word "sorrows" is the Greek *ωδιν*, *'odin*, Matt 24:8, which literally means "birth pains." This indicates that when these things happen, the events named, famine, pestilence, and earthquakes, indicate that the signs and events are in their beginning stages of unfolding.

## 4. The International Hatred of Israel and the Jews, 24:9-10

- The Animosity of the Arab World - It is hard to believe how deep the hatred of Arab for Jew sinks into the culture of the Middle East today. It is a problem that is as old as Abraham who lived 4,100 years ago in the land of Canaan. Ishmael was the firstborn son of Abraham, but not to his wife Sarah. This arranged marriage to Sarah's handmaid was a human attempt to reach a divine goal, see, Gen 16:1-16; 17:19-20. God clearly

had a miracle son, Isaac, who was to be the child of promise to carry forth the covenant promises and blessings, Gen 17:21-22. This bad decision has resulted in a 4,100-year-old bitter and violent family feud.

- The Holocaust - While still denied by some, especially Muslim states, the annihilation of 9 million Jews by Hitler is one of the saddest chapters in human history. It is a sobering reminder that Satan hates the Jewish people because they brought the Messiah to the world, see Rev 12:1-17, esp. v. 13. The holocaust is a radically unthinkable response from those who are anti-Semitic and simply hate Jewish people.
- Political and Media Bias Against Israel - The media bias has resulted in lies, distortions, and false statements about Israel. An Associated Press story released a few years ago chronicled an alleged attack against Palestinians on the Temple Mount and included a picture. I became suspicious because there was a gas station sign [Pez Gas] in the photo. There are no gas stations on the Temple Mount. The "victim" of the beating in the picture turned out to be a Jewish man beaten by Palestinians in East Jerusalem. This fabricated story is clear evidence of the media's bias against Israel.

#### **5. The Rise of False Prophets, 24:11**

- There are false prophets with a false message to Israel. For example, dual covenant theologians claim that the Jews can be saved without believing in Jesus and in opposition to Romans 9:1 - 11:36.
- There are false prophets with a false message to the rest of the world. These bogus prophets deny the exclusive claims of Christ and teach that there are many ways to salvation, and that any religion is valid if one is seeking God and one is sincere in his beliefs. Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, and more, are considered valid means of reaching God by these false teachers who ignore the Bible's claim in Acts 4:12.

#### **6. The Rise of Lawless and Loveless Culture, 24:12**

- This culture will be characterized by anarchy and loss of the rule of law. Pick up your newspaper. Anarchy is a world wide epidemic as we have seen since the recent assassination of Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan.
- There is even an "anarchy" website that incites people to join a world wide alliance of non-conformity to any form of rule or governmental authority so that everyone can do whatever seems right in his own eyes, see Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25. There also is an on line anarchy game that offers an anarchy cookbook and other paraphernalia.
- As in Matthew 24, a culture ruled by anarchists will be characterized by a loss of human compassion, see e.g. 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:9.

#### **7. The Continued Promise of Salvation for the Jews, 24:13**

- "Enduring" to the end, 24:13, has nothing to do with salvation for anyone except the Jews. This refers to the "blindness" of the Jews to Jesus as the Messiah, see Isa 6:9-10; John 12:40 and see especially Rom 11:25.
- Paul had a vision of hope that reveals that one day all Israel will be saved by accepting Jesus as their Messiah, Rom 11:26-36. Even now there is a saved remnant of Messianic Jews. But Paul could see a day when the veil would be removed, Rom 11:25-28, as presented in the prophecy of Zechariah, see Zech 12:10 - 13:6. This is a great encouragement for Jewish evangelism because we know that the Jews who endure until the end time will have the veil lifted and all Israel then, will be saved.

#### **8. The Universal Proclamation of the Gospel, 24:14**

- This is a simple and straightforward promise that the whole world will be exposed to the Gospel of "salvation in Christ alone," before the end comes. It is difficult to specify the meaning as some have tried to do by saying that it means every person must hear the Gospel preached. These interpretations are not consistent with the many who have died already never having heard the Gospel message. Radio, television, satellite, film, CD, DVD, and personal venues are already preaching the Gospel worldwide.
- There are still others trying to reach the so-called "unreached people groups," so that Jesus will "have to come," based on this word in 24:14. However, Jesus is not bound to the dictates of those who are contriving to force His return, not so much to win the world but to fulfill the qualification so, "Jesus will have to come." These people may be surprised to learn that He will not come based on some contrived qualification established by men.

#### **9. The Advent of the Abomination of Desolation, 24:15; Dan 9:27**

- The "Abomination of Desolation" refers to the prophecy of the seventy weeks of years in Daniel 9:24-27, in which the Antichrist makes a covenant of peace with Israel and then after three-and-a-half years breaks the covenant, desecrates the Temple, and seeks to annihilate the Jews.
- The Jews flee for their lives as is mentioned in point #10 which follows.

#### **10. The Flight of Israel From the Land, 24:16-20**

- This event occurs in the last days when Israel flees their land after the Antichrist breaks his covenant and tries to annihilate them, Dan 9:27.
- Many believe that Israel will flee for refuge in Petra for three-and-a-half years, Rev 12:13-17. Details of this flight are related to someone living in Israel, e.g. "Judea," "on the housetop," "flight not in winter."

#### **11. The Advent of Unprecedented Calamity and Upheaval, 24:21-22**

- The tragedy to top all tragedies is more severe and unprecedented than anything considered up to this point and is beyond the tsunamis, beyond the killer hurricanes and typhoons, beyond devastating earthquakes.

- The days must be shortened in order to preserve life and God will shorten them for the sake of the "elect." These judgments are so awesome that Rev 8:1 says when they are about to be unleashed there is silence in heaven for an hour.

#### **12. The Proliferation of False Messiahs, 24:23-26**

- This is an expansion of 24:4-5. There will be many who will say, "Here is the Christ (the Messiah)." These will be deceivers working miracles and wonders, trying to authenticate their ministry as Jesus did.
- They will be smooth operators who will seek to deceive the elect. Twice there is the warning, "Do not believe it!" 24:23, 26.

#### **13. The Second Coming of Jesus, 24:27-31**

- He will come quickly, like a bolt of lightning, which means there will be no time to prepare, see Matt 25:1-13, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.
- There will be a great multitude of casualties, cf. Ezek 39:1-29.
- There will be great cosmic cataclysm, 24:29; cf Isa 34:4; Rev 6:14.
- There will be great mourning by the nations as they finally see Him and realize, "Oh no! It is true! Jesus really is the Messiah!"
- Jesus will appear in the heavens as predicted in Acts 1: 11, and all the earth will plunge into fear and mourning, 24:30; cf. Rev 6:14-17.

#### **14. The Key to Understanding the Prophecy: The Fig Tree, 24:32-35**

- The key to understanding the Olivet Discourse is found in 24:32-35, the parable of the fig tree. In this parable Israel is the "fig tree," a figure found in the Old Testament in Hosea 9:10: "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree at her first time."
- Other passages that identify Israel with the "fig tree" include Joel 1:7 "He hath laid my vine waste, and barked (splintered) my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast *it* away; the branches thereof are made white." Zechariah 3:10 also uses the vine and fig tree as restoration and prosperity of Israel. Compare this with Luke 13:6: "He spoke also this parable; A certain *man* had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none." The fig tree here clearly is Israel.
- The point of this section 24:32-35 is to show that the entire Olivet Discourse is not about the church or any nation other than Israel. We are to interpret the events in 24:1-31 as they relate to Israel.

#### **15. No One Knows or Can Predict the Day or Hour, 24:36**

- Anyone who claims to have discovered the time of Jesus' return is telling you more than they know.
- No person now knows or will ever know this information. At the same time we are told to be wise as serpents and discerning of the times,

especially as we see all these things know it, [literally He], is near, even at the doors, 24:33, cf 16:3; Heb 10:25.

#### **16. The Time Will Be Like the Days of Noah, 24:37-39**

- Jesus made the same striking comparisons between the wickedness of the human family and the impending judgment to befall the earth at the Second Coming of Jesus. He said, "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt 24:37).
- See also the attached Lesson on "The Days of Noah," an overview of Genesis 6:1-7.

#### **17. Be Watchful! You Do Not Know the Day of His Coming, 24:40-44**

- Two men will be working in the field. Only one will be taken the other left behind. Two women will be grinding at the mill. Only one will be taken and the other left behind. In each case the one prepared was taken up, raptured, to be with the Lord.
- The admonition is, "**Watch therefore, for you do not know the day your Lord is coming,**" 24:41. It is like a thief who, if you knew when and where he was going to break in and enter your home, you could be ready. But, since you cannot know, you must be diligent and constantly ready, 24:43.
- Here then is the great lesson. "**Therefore you also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect,**" 24:44.

#### **18. The Faithful Are Those Who Wisely Remain Prepared, 24:45-51**

- God expects His children to be faithful and alert to the signs of the times. That servant will be blessed and rewarded at the coming of his master, 24:45-46.
- The evil servant is described as careless, cruel, carousing, and will be appropriately judged upon the arrival of his master, 24:47-51.

#### **19. The Parables and Judgment of the End Time, 25:1-46**

These parables explore three relevant themes related to the return of our Lord Jesus.

- The Wise and Foolish Virgins, 25:1-13 (Be wise and prepared)
- The Parable of the Talents, 25:14-30 (Be faithful and diligent)
- The Judgment of the Nations, 25:31-46 (Be transparent and accountable)

#### **Conclusion**

This sobering passage brings to mind the questions posed by the psalmist in Psalm 15:1, "Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?" The answer follows in 15:2-5, which describes the character of those who belong to God. At the last, when we appear before God we will only stand if we are dressed in the righteousness of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior and only hope, Acts 4:12.