

The Olivet Discourse

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The sermon explores the Olivet Discourse, emphasizing the prophetic teachings of Jesus regarding the end times and the fate of Israel.

Scripture: Matthew 23:37, Matthew 24:4, Matthew 24:9, Matthew 24:14-15

Topics: "Eschatology", "Kingdom Of God"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer preaches on the final revelations of the kingdom as presented in the Gospel of Matthew, focusing on the birth, rejection, mystery form, and return of the King to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth. The Gospel traces the movements of Israel, her failures, sorrows, and future blessings under the reign of the returning Messiah King, with the church appearing incidentally as a mystery of a mystery age. The events leading to the realization of the kingdom are detailed in exact order, from the lineage and birth of the King to His rejection, crucifixion, and the final renewal of the kingdom offer to the nation of Israel.

Transcript

IT has pleased the Spirit to present in the Gospel by Matthew the final revelations of the kingdom. These begin with the birth of the King, follow through His rejection, picture the mystery form of the kingdom, and predict the return of the King to the earth, the sphere of the kingdom of heaven. Like the Old Testament prophets, this kingdom traces only the movements of Israel, her failures, her sorrows, and her coming blessings under the reign of her returning Messiah King. In this Gospel the church appears incidentally as one of the several mysteries of a mystery age. In this body of Scripture the walk and destiny of the church are not once in view.

The events leading up to the realization of the kingdom in the earth are given by Matthew in their exact order. He begins with the lineage and birth of the King. This is followed by the announcement by the King, by John the Baptist and by the disciples, of the kingdom as at hand, with a call for the great predicted national repentance. During this season of the offered kingdom, the King announces the principles of righteousness that must obtain when the kingdom comes. He teaches them to pray: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." The eleventh chapter records the first evidence of the rejection of the King,--the imprisonment of His forerunner. From this time the Jews take counsel to kill the King and the national rejection of His kingly claims is seen to deepen, as He faithfully continues to offer Himself, until their final answer to that offer is His crucifixion by the rulers of the nation. Yet even after His

ascension, the unmeasured grace of God is seen in the final renewal of the kingdom offer to that nation through the Apostle Peter in his second sermon in Jerusalem. Peter begins by declaring that God's covenants will all be fulfilled, and that the death of Christ was anticipated by the prophets, and is now accomplished. He presents Christ as having been received into heaven to remain until the restitution of all things spoken of by the prophets. This is not a Gentile church enlarged to encompass the earth; but the mighty restoration of the Davidic order and the everlasting reestablishment of the chosen nation in their own land, in full kingdom blessing, all of which God hath sworn with an oath to perform. This final appeal, like those which preceded it, was made with the same repentance in view: "Repent, that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." The answer of the nation to this appeal was the imprisonment of the messengers and the placing of the official ban upon their message.

As the evidence of rejection began to appear, according to Matthew, Jesus began to speak of His decease, of the hitherto unannounced mystery age, and that to be followed by His return to the earth as King in world-transforming scenes of judgment and the final establishment of the kingdom in the earth. Yet it must be remembered that only Israel is addressed and in this Gospel nations are seen only as related to her. Thus this Gospel is presented true to the exact scope of the kingdom of heaven.

Preceding the "Olivet discourse" of Mt. xxiv. 4 - xxv. 46 a picture is given of the love of Christ for His nation and Jerusalem, the city of the great King. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mt. xxiii. 37-39).

He would oft have gathered them (as He will yet do according to Mt. xxiv. 31); but they would not. Their house is left unto them desolate; but not forever. "Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

The "Olivet discourse," it should be noted, was the Lord's reply to three questions asked of him by His disciples: First, "When shall these things be?" referring to His preceding prophecy as to the levelling of the stones of the temple to the ground. This first question is not answered in Matthew's account, but is found in Luke xxi. 20-24. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." This catastrophe, we are told, occurred in the year 70 A. D. The second question: "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?" and the third: "and of the end of the age?" are answered in Matthew's account beginning with xxiv. 4.

In opening this discourse Christ first describes the character of the whole age leading up to His return in power and great glory [xxiv. 30]. The emphasis here is wholly on [the] end-time and its character, according to the request of His disciples. He, however, forecasts the whole time from the hour He was speaking through to the end. He divides this time into two periods. The first of these, extending over nearly the whole period, or up to the last seven years, is characterized by war, famine, pestilence and earthquake

which are doubtless to become increasingly violent as the time of the end draws near. He distinctly states that these age-long characteristics are common to the whole age, rather than constituting the end, or a sign of the end. The passage is as follows: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet"(lit. "but not yet is the end," or "this is not the end"). For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Mt. xxiv. 4-8).

This prophecy of the character of the age has been proven by nearly two thousand years of history. It is now seen to be as accurate a description of the age as a present-day historian, looking back over the centuries, could write. In spite of the dreams of peace for the "great enlightened twentieth century," so fresh in our minds, it stands without a parallel, even in its fifteenth year, as the superlative in all that the Lord Himself assigned as characterizing features of this age. These positive predictions, among many others, which find no possible Biblical interpretation against them, fell from the lips of the Son of God and have been verified by the terrible facts of history up to the present hour; yet men dream of peace by manmade treaties and agreements as though our God had never spoken, or centuries of human greed and cruelty had not been experienced. War plainly belongs to the kingdom of Satan. It will cease for a thousand years while he is in the pit; but it will be instantly revived with all its horrors as soon as he is loosed a little season (Rev. xx. 1-9). Jesus said to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world (world system): if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (Jno. xviii. 36). War results from the fallen nature of man, and is under the power of Satan, and will be until that mighty being is chained and put in the pit and the world-transforming kingdom of Messiah is set up in the earth. "Unto the end wars and desolations are determined" (Dan. ix. 26).

The war, famine, pestilence and earthquake features, which characterize this entire age, were spoken of by Christ as "the beginning of sorrows," or more literally, the beginning of birth pains (xxiv. 8). This evidently anticipates a time of sorrow, or of birth. He then proceeds to describe this coming period as the "great tribulation," which, as has been seen, is no other than the long predicted "time of Jacob's trouble," the time for the consummation of the "mystery of iniquity" and the final judgments on the whole Gentile world, to be terminated, as set forth in all other passages on the subject, by the resistless power and glory of the coming King.

The description of this sorrow, or tribulation time, begins with the ninth verse. The time word "then," with which this verse opens, serves to shift the scenes from what has characterized the age to those conditions which will "then" prevail: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (xxiv. 9). This was distinctly addressed to Jews; for they alone could be "hated of all nations." It is the "time of Jacob's trouble" and they are the "elect" mentioned throughout the passage. He then said: "And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved"(xxiv. 10-13).

This is not a condition of final salvation under grace: it was addressed to a nation who were to experience great tribulation, and forms a promise that will be most precious to those to whom it shall apply. So, also, the verse that follows is often confused with the present gospel of grace: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (xxiv. 14). A

call to national repentance and the final announcement of the kingdom must yet again be taken up, as it will be by "an hundred and forty and four thousand" sealed ones, and by the two witnesses, before the King returns (Rev. vii. 4 - xi. 19). There is no such geographical demand on the preaching of grace in this age: on the contrary, the preaching here referred to cannot begin until the preaching of grace has accomplished its end in the calling out of His bride, which event and people are not at all in view in this great discourse. His bride will have been taken to Himself (before verse 9), for she is to be kept from the hour of trial that shall come on all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth (Rev. iii. 10) There will doubtless be great numbers saved during the tribulation (Rev. vii. 12-17). They will not, however, have part in the special blessings of the bride; for when she shall have entered in, the door will be shut.

Jesus then anticipates the "Man of Sin" standing in the "holy place" as foreseen by Daniel and later more fully described by Paul (2 Thess. ii. 1-9), and John (Rev. xiii. 3-10). This is followed by special warnings which are very similar to those given to the same nation with regard to the destruction of Jerusalem which took place in 70 A. D. The conditions of siege and the tribulation will be so similar that the warnings are almost identical; but it does not follow that they anticipate the same event. One is but a foreshadow of the other. The passage reads thus: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet stand in the holy place (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved, but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chamber; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes. of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"(xxiv. 15-31).

In this passage it is important to note that the coming of Christ in power and great glory is the termination of the tribulation and time of Israel's regathering, as has been predicted by the prophets from Moses to Christ. The same order obtains in all similar passages (see Acts xv. 13-18; 2 Thess. ii. 1-10; so of the prophets and the Revelation). Israel, as a nation, not one generation, is to be divinely preserved until all be fulfilled: "Verily I say unto you, This generation (genea, race, or stock, Israel) shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (xxiv. 34, 35).

The returning Christ will find it on the earth as it was in the days of Noah (38), when some shall be taken away in judgment and some left for kingdom blessing. This is the opposite of the calling away of the bride, then some are taken for blessing and some are left in judgments and sorrow. The return of Christ is then presented as a testing of all profession under the parable of the ten virgins, and the test of all service

under the parable of the talents. So, also, "when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, 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 divideth his sheep from the goats" (xxv. 31). This is in no way comparable with the Great White Throne judgment of Rev. xx. 11-15. That is at the end of a thousand years of kingdom blessing: this is before. All is different in time, place and. subjects, as well as conditions. This judgment is of nations at the end of the time of Jacob's trouble, and concerns their treatment of "my brethren" according to the flesh. The issue is to those on His right hand: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

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