

# The Olivet Discourse – Matthew 24

Material condensed from *A Case for Amillennialism* by Kim Riddlebarger & *Kingdom Come* by Sam Storms

## REVIEW

Presupposition – something that is assumed in advance or taken for granted.

### ***Two Principles of Interpretation***

- 1) The text must be read with an acute awareness to the immediate historical context in which the passage took place.
- 2) Let the Old Testament define the terms, phrases or images that are used in “end times” passages. The New Testament authors use O.T. vocabulary as a vehicle of expression.

### ***Key to Interpretation***

It would seem based on the context that the key to understanding Jesus’ discourse can be found in looking closely at how Jesus answers the three questions asked by His disciples in vs. 3. The following questions are in response to Matthew 23:1-24:2, but specifically 23:37-39.

- ❖ Question 1 – When will the temple be destroyed?
- ❖ Question 2 – What will be the sign that you are returning?
- ❖ Question 3 – How will we know that the end of the age is upon us?

### ***Signs of the Time***

Jesus responds to His disciples’ first question of “when” will the temple be destroyed by highlighting eight signs in vs. 4-14 that will occur prior to the temple’s destruction. The events that Jesus identifies will characterize the period between the present 33 A.D. and destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

#### **1) The sign of “religious imposters and messianic pretenders” (vs. 5)**

-see Acts 5:36-37; 8:9-10; 13:6

#### **2) Military conflicts (vs. 6)**

#### **3) Political upheaval (vs. 7a)**

#### **4) Natural disasters (vs. 7b)**

- Widespread famine (cf. Acts 11:28) occurred in the year 44 A.D.
- During Nero’s reign in A.D. 60 – a large comet appeared leading people to speculate judgment or change was imminent
- 66 A.D. was the appearance of Halley’s Comet

**5) Persecution and martyrdom (vs. 9-10)**

**6) False prophets (vs. 11)**

- cf. Acts 20:29-30; Romans 16:17-18)

**7) Religious insurrection & indifference (vs. 12-13)**

**8) Widespread preaching of the gospel (vs. 14)**

**Discussion:** What are the clues from the “historical context” of the passage that would indicate all of what occurred in 24:4-14 was fulfilled in the 1<sup>st</sup> century?

The term “whole world” in vs. 14 is an expression often used at that time to describe the Greek world. (see Luke 2:1; Acts 11:27-28; Acts 24:4-5)

The New Testament writers understood vs. 14 to be a 1<sup>st</sup> century fulfillment through their own experience. (see Colossians 1:3-6; 1:21-23; Romans 1:8; 10:17-18) All of these passages were written “prior” to A.D. 70 when the temple was destroyed.

Jesus is highlighting the fact that after His resurrection the gospel will be preached outside the boundaries of Judea so that the Gentile nations will hear and believe the story of His redemptive work.

***The One Sign***

It is clear in the discourse that Jesus now moves from the signs leading up to the destruction of the temple to one specific sign that identifies when the temple will be destroyed.

**REMINDER:** It is at this point that we need to be reminded of our first principle for interpretation - The text must be read with an acute awareness to the immediate historical context in which the passage took place.

66 A.D. – The Jewish-Roman wars are underway. Jewish rebels are fighting back against the Roman Empire and Rome responds.

67-68 A.D. – A Roman general by the name of Vespasian had conquered the majority of Palestine. Vespasian had a son by the name of Titus, who served as a general in the Roman army. In A.D. 70 Titus put Jerusalem under siege for five months until the temple and city were completely destroyed.

This time frame of what happened in history just 40 years after Jesus’ discourse is crucial to understand. It was a time in Jewish history that was one of great suffering.

**KEY:** In vs. 15 when Jesus says “when you see the abomination of desolation” He is referring to an action or object of disgust that is an idolatrous offense to the true worship of God. Jesus’ audience was familiar with this term and what it meant from the Old Testament and their minds were likely drawn back to Syrian King Antiochus who ruled Palestine in 175-165 B.C.

**Crucial Question:** *What was the abomination of desolation to which Jesus referred?* Based on the historical context it is clear as we look back on this moment in history that the abomination of desolation is Titus and the armies of Rome. From history, we know that while Jerusalem was burning and surrounded Titus and his soldiers brought their legionary standards (emblem and banner) that identified their military units and placed them in the temple and offered sacrifices there declaring Titus the ultimate victor.

The idolatrous representations of Caesar and the Roman eagle on the legionary standards in the temple would have constituted the worst imaginable blasphemy to the Jewish people.

Jesus warns them when it happens to flee because it will be unimaginable suffering. Josephus recorded the events that unfolded during this time in his history.

**KEY:** Jesus refers to this period as “a great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.” What does this mean? Once again, this is a phrase that must be examined considering the Old Testament.

Scholars have long recognized that “descriptions of judgment are expressed in language that is universal and radical.” It is intended to emphasize how truly horrible an event this will be. (see Exodus 11:6; Ezekiel 5:9 – impending Babylonian captivity)

Jesus summarizes this section by urging them not to look for His second coming in the chaos surrounding the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.

In vs. 27-28 He points out that His coming will be obvious and visible in the same way a vulture’s presence means there is a dead body but as unexpected as the flash of lightning. The great tribulation Jesus is warning of is not a future event but an accomplished fact of history past.