

## Outline of The Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24:1-25:46

This is one of the more difficult passages of Scripture to interpret properly. There are several reasons for this. One is a general lack of understanding about Christian eschatology. Another is the tendency for interpreters to favor symbolic or allegorical interpretation instead of literal interpretation.

### Outline

- I. Destruction of the Temple Foretold ..... 24:1-2
- II. The Disciples' Two Questions:..... 24:3
  - A. When will these things be (the destruction of the temple)?.....24:3a
  - B. What will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age? ..... 24:3b
- III. Jesus Answers about “Non-Signs”..... 24:4-8
  - A. The deception of false christ..... 24:4-5
  - B. Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes: the end is not yet..... 24:6-8
- IV. Jesus Answers with Increasingly Close Signs ..... 24:9-26
  - A. Heavy persecution and more false prophets ..... 24:9-12
  - B. Those who hold out until the end will be saved..... 24:13
  - E. Universal preaching of the Gospel right before the end..... 24:14
  - D. The Abomination of Desolation..... 24:15-20
    - 1. The event..... 24:15
    - 2. The urgency to flee ..... 24:16-20
  - E. Great Tribulation ..... 24:21-22
  - F. More deception by false christs, prophets, and signs ..... 24:23-26
- V. Jesus Answers with THE Sign of His Coming and the End ..... 24:27-31
  - A. It will be obvious, like lightning and carrion birds ..... 24:27-28
  - B. Disturbance of the heavenly bodies ..... 24:29
  - C. The sign is the Son of Man coming in the clouds .....24:30a
  - D. The people of the earth will mourn..... 24:30b
  - E. The angels are sent to gather the elect in the earth..... 24:31
- VI. Jesus Answers the “When” Question..... 24:32-25:30
  - A. Parable of fig tree: the “when” will be evident..... 24:32-35
  - B. Fact: no one knows the day or hour ..... 24:36
  - C. Consequently, you must be ready ..... 24:37-25:30
    - 1. Illustration of the days of Noah ..... 24:37-39
    - 2. Sudden devastating judgment demands readiness ..... 24:40-44
    - 3. Illustration of faithful and evil servants: be ready ..... 24:45-51
    - 4. Parable of virgins: be prepared for delay and be ready .... 25:1-13
    - 5. Parable of the talents: be ready by being faithful ..... 25:14-30
- VII. Judgment of Gentiles: Immediately After the Second Coming ..... 25:31-46
  - A. The nations separated into two groups..... 25:31-33
  - B. Judgment of the sheep on the right hand..... 25:34-40
  - C. Judgment of the goats on the left hand..... 25:41-46

## Notes

1. The keyword *when* comes up in 24:3 (in the question), and 24:15, 32, and 33.
2. The keyword *sign* appears in in 24:3 (in the question), and 24:24 and 30. In verse 24, it refers to deceiving signs. A *sign* is an event or indication that something is going to happen.
3. Jesus begins his answer in 24:4, and continues all the way through chapter 25. The narrator does not pick up again until 26:1.
4. It would be nice to outline the passage with a clean division between Jesus' answers for the *when* question and his answer for the *sign* question. But this is not the most accurate way to understand the text because the signs are inter-connected with the timing. The foretold events give clues as to when Jesus will come and end the age. Verse 33 makes this connection explicit: "When you see all these things [signs], know that it [the coming of Christ] is near [the when]—at the door." But these clues are not present-day clues. They are tied to the few final years of time before the King and His kingdom appears.
5. Ultimately, the answer to the "when" question cannot be known because Jesus says explicitly that no one knows the day or hour (24:36). Only to those who live during the very last days will the timing become evident.
6. The Lord speaks about some *non-signs* in 24:6-7. This is a corrective for those who look for signs in the daily news. Such events are actually non-signs because "the end is not yet" (24:6).
7. 24:9-12 will especially characterize the time leading up to the coming of Christ. But all the indicators will be growing throughout the present age leading up to the very end. We should not be surprised by expressions of human depravity today that look much like the increasingly bad expressions of depravity near the end.
8. The disciples asked a question that was prompted by the Lord's statement that the temple will be destroyed. But the remainder of the chapter does not focus on that event. The temple was destroyed in history. But the Bible discloses that it will be rebuilt and operational during the Tribulation. *That* temple is the one that will be desecrated and probably entirely destroyed in the end time (Rev. 11:1-3). It will be replaced by a temple in our Lord's millennial kingdom. This millennial temple is described with great detail in Ezekiel 40–48.
9. The "enduring to the end" in 24:13 is often mis-used to refer to perseverance of the saints in a general context. It refers to a specific situation—enduring to the end of the Tribulation. I used to hold simply that those who "physically survived" until the end were saved, i.e. physically saved at the end by the Lord's deliverance. But both believers and unbelievers will be physically delivered from the Tribulation, so this is somewhat dissatisfying. It is better understood to do with the context of the Tribulation. Those who live in it and survive with their faith intact and their love not cold: these will be rescued physically and will enter into kingdom blessing (25:34). There are others who will survive to the end of the Tribulation but will be cast out as goats in the judgment (25:41-46).
10. We have to understand that "the end" is not a single minute or hour or even day. The "end" is a broader term that refers to a period of time in which a God's program for the current age comes to a close. It culminates in a period of a few years where there is extreme distress in the world followed by the second coming of Jesus Christ.
11. The parable of the talents in 25:14-30 teaches that believers will be judged for their faithfulness in carrying out the Lord's assignment while He is gone. It fits in the larger context in the following way. The Lord will be gone for an indeterminate length of time, thus making it necessary for us to be always ready for His return. The parable answers the question how we can be ready for His return: by being always faithful in what He has assigned during His absence.

12. The judgment of 25:31-46 is not a judgment of all people of all time as is often assumed in the “general resurrection” understanding. It is a judgment of those Gentiles who survive the Tribulation. They are judged as to their fruit, which shows whether they were regenerated or not. The fruit specifically has to do with their treatment of the nation of Israel during the recent years of the Tribulation. The Jews are judged in a different event, discussed in Ezekiel 20:33-38.
13. The events spoken of by Jesus cannot have occurred around A.D. 70, despite that very common misunderstanding.<sup>1</sup> For one thing, the number and length of events he foretells seem to preclude it. Another key reason is that the abomination of desolation did not occur at that time—not in terms of the timing as foretold by Daniel (9:27) nor the manner of it as it will be done (Paul in 2 Thess. 2:3-4). Third, the subject matter of Matthew 24 concerns the coming of Christ, not the coming of Romans. Obviously Christ has not yet come; the events closely associated with His coming cannot be transformed into events that speak of the coming of the Romans. Furthermore, certain signs were not fulfilled in 70 AD—for example, the heavenly bodies were not disturbed, and there were not widespread wars in the world, and there were no earthquakes and the like.

### Parallel Passages, Up to the Parable of the Fig Tree and Noah Illustration

Matthew 24:1-42	Mark 13:1-33	Luke 21:5-36
<b>The Disciples’ Questions</b>		
<p><sup>1</sup> Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. <sup>2</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not <i>one</i> stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what <i>will be</i> the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"</p>	<p><sup>1</sup> Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings <i>are here!</i>" <sup>2</sup> And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not <i>one</i> stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, <sup>4</sup> "Tell us, when will these things be? And what <i>will be</i> the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"</p>	<p><sup>5</sup> Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, <sup>6</sup> "These things which you see—the days will come in which not <i>one</i> stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down."</p> <p><sup>7</sup> So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign <i>will there be</i> when these things are about to take place?"</p>
<b>Jesus Begins His Answer</b>		
<p><sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.</p> <p><sup>6</sup> "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all <i>these things</i> must come to pass, but the end is not yet.</p> <p><sup>7</sup> "For nation will rise against nation,</p>	<p><sup>5</sup> And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup> "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am <i>He</i>,' and will deceive many.</p> <p><sup>7</sup> "But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for <i>such things</i> must happen, but the end <i>is</i> not yet.</p> <p><sup>8</sup> "For nation will rise against nation,</p>	<p><sup>8</sup> And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am <i>He</i>,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> "But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end <i>will not come</i> immediately."</p> <p><sup>10</sup> Then He said to them, "Nation will</p>

<sup>1</sup> According to this very incorrect article on Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abomination\\_of\\_desolation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abomination_of_desolation).

<p>and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> "All these <i>are</i> the beginning of sorrows.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. <sup>10</sup> "And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. <sup>12</sup> "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> "But he who endures to the end shall be saved.</p> <p><sup>14</sup> "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.</p>	<p>and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These <i>are</i> the beginnings of sorrows.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> "But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.</p> <p><sup>10</sup> "And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> "But when they arrest <i>you</i> and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. <sup>12</sup> "Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father <i>his</i> child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. <sup>13</sup> "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.</p>	<p>rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. <sup>11</sup> "And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.</p> <p><sup>12</sup> "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute <i>you</i>, delivering <i>you</i> up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. <sup>13</sup> "But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.</p> <p><sup>14</sup> "Therefore settle <i>it</i> in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; <sup>15</sup> "for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. <sup>16</sup> "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put <i>some</i> of you to death. <sup>17</sup> "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. <sup>18</sup> "But not a hair of your head shall be lost. <sup>19</sup> "By your patience possess your souls.</p>
<p><b>The Abomination of Desolation</b></p>		
<p><sup>15</sup> "Therefore when you see the `abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place " (whoever reads, let him understand), <sup>16</sup> "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>17</sup> "Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. <sup>18</sup> "And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. <sup>19</sup> "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! <sup>20</sup> "And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.</p>	<p><sup>14</sup> "So when you see the `abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not " (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>15</sup> "Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. <sup>16</sup> "And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. <sup>17</sup> "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! <sup>18</sup> "And pray that your flight may not be in winter.</p>	<p><sup>20</sup> "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. <sup>21</sup> "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. <sup>22</sup> "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. <sup>23</sup> "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.</p>

<p><sup>21</sup> "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>22</sup> "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.</p> <p><sup>23</sup> "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here <i>is</i> the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe <i>it</i>. <sup>24</sup> "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. <sup>25</sup> "See, I have told you beforehand. <sup>26</sup> "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, <i>He is</i> in the inner rooms!' do not believe <i>it</i>.</p>	<p><sup>19</sup> "For <i>in</i> those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. <sup>20</sup> "And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.</p> <p><sup>21</sup> "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here <i>is</i> the Christ!' or, 'Look, <i>He is</i> there!' do not believe <i>it</i>. <sup>22</sup> "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. <sup>23</sup> "But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.</p>	<p><sup>24</sup> "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.</p>
<p><b>Immediately Preceding Signs</b></p>		
<p><sup>27</sup> "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>28</sup> "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.</p> <p><sup>29</sup> "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.</p>	<p><sup>24</sup> "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; <sup>25</sup> "the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.</p>	<p><sup>25</sup> "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; <sup>26</sup> "men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken.</p>
<p><b>The Sign of the Son of Man</b></p>		
<p><sup>30</sup> "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.</p> <p><sup>31</sup> "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.</p>	<p><sup>26</sup> "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.</p> <p><sup>27</sup> "And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.</p>	<p><sup>27</sup> "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.</p> <p><sup>28</sup> "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."</p>

<p><b>The Fig Tree and the Need to be Ready</b></p>		
<p><sup>32</sup> "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer <i>is</i> near.</p> <p><sup>33</sup> "So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! <sup>34</sup> "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.</p> <p><sup>35</sup> "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.</p> <p><sup>36</sup> But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.</p> <p><sup>37</sup> "But as the days of Noah <i>were</i>, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>38</sup> "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>40</sup> "Then two <i>men</i> will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> "Two <i>women will be</i> grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.</p> <p><sup>42</sup> "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.</p>	<p><sup>28</sup> "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.</p> <p><sup>29</sup> "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! <sup>30</sup> "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.</p> <p><sup>31</sup> "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.</p> <p><sup>32</sup> "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.</p> <p><sup>33</sup> "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.</p>	<p><sup>29</sup> Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> "When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.</p> <p><sup>31</sup> "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place.</p> <p><sup>33</sup> "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.</p> <p><sup>34</sup> "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. <sup>35</sup> "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.</p> <p><sup>36</sup> "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."</p>