

Prophecy and the Mount of Olives

by Douglas E. Cox

Matthew chapters 24 & 25 contain one of the key prophecies of the Bible, known as the "Olivet Discourse," as Jesus gave this prophecy to his disciples when they were on the mount of Olives, a prominent ridge to the east of the city of Jerusalem, which in those days provided an excellent view of the temple located on the opposite side of the Kidron valley.

The disciples had asked Jesus about the signs of his coming, and of Christ's kingdom. Jesus warned them about false teachers, and mentioned a time of "great tribulation." Symbols that Jesus employed in the Olivet Prophecy include mountains, seasons, clothes, clouds, fig trees, virgins, a wedding, and the mysterious "abomination of desolation."

Was the Olivet Discourse intended only for first century Jews? That's what the Preterists claim. Or was it intended for Jews in the future? That is the premise of Dispensationalism and futurism. A third possibility is that it pertains to Christians today, and of every age. The temple of God, that stood in plain view from the top of the mount of Olives, was a type, or figure, that represents the Church, and the Olivet Discourse of Jesus provides an overview of the future of the spiritual temple, which the Church is, and of the kingdom of God.

The mount of Olives itself was a very significant location for Jesus to give this prophecy. The mount of Olives is featured in the book of Zechariah, which said the Lord's feet would stand upon it. Jesus fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy when he gave the Olivet Discourse to his disciples. Zechariah said the mount of Olives would be split into two parts, one half moving to the north, and the other half moving to the south, forming a wide valley. Of course that has not happened, in a literal sense. However, Zechariah's prophecy may point out to us the proper way to interpret Jesus' Olivet Discourse.

Zechariah described the mount of Olives being cleaved in the midst, and a wide valley being formed when the two sections moved apart. He said that we should flee to this "valley of the

mountains." Zechariah 14:1-3 describes Jerusalem as a city invaded by the heathen. Half its inhabitants are taken into captivity. Jerusalem was a type of the church, so perhaps this represents Christians who have been "taken captive" by those who promote flawed interpretations of scripture, and by the many creeds, and denominations, that separate Christians from one another.

The temple was broken down, and burned to ashes, in 70 AD when the city of Jerusalem was taken by the Romans. History shows that the church also was overcome, and made desolate, and the saints were scattered.

Zechariah 14:2

For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

Throughout the history of the church, believers have been taken captive in different sects, and religious movements, which is portrayed in Zechariah's prophecy.

Zechariah 14:4-5

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

Zechariah said to flee to the valley formed between the two halves of the mount of Olives when it divides into two parts. Interpreting this, the mount of Olives is a symbol representing the famous prophecy that Jesus gave there. The mountain cleaving in the midst and the two halves of the mountain moving in opposite directions represent the two methods of interpreting the Olivet Discourse, Preterism and Dispensationalism, which displace the prophecy from its true application. The Olivet Discourse applies, not to Jews in a future seven year tribulation, or to the Jews in the first century, but to Christians in the present age.

The mountains of Israel are prominent parts of the promised land. They represent the promises given to Abraham, that in his seed, all nations will be blessed. When Jesus said to "flee to the mountains," he meant that we should seek those promises, and the kingdom of God, which is represented by the great mountain that fills the earth, in Daniel 2:35.

Zechariah said the day of the Lord will be a time that is "not clear, nor dark." But in the evening, it will be light. This indicates that eventually, when the present age draws to its close, the truth will prevail, and prophecy will be understood. Daniel 12:10 confirms this.

In this cloudy day, Christ delivers his saints. "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." [Ezekiel 34:12]

During a time of confusion, Christ seeks his sheep, and leads them to the truth. The prophet Joel refers to it as "a day of clouds and thick darkness."

Joel 2:1-2

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

The prophet Zephaniah also describes it as a day of clouds and spiritual darkness.

Zephaniah 1:14-16

The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

In the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus warns believers not to return for our old clothes: "Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes." [Matthew 24:18]

Jesus refers to clothing as symbolic of the truth of the gospel, not literally. Returning for our own clothes pictures hanging on to old beliefs and interpretations instead of accepting the truth, when Jesus reveals it.

Who are the ones "in the field"? Perhaps they are the *labourers* who Jesus mentioned here:

Luke 10:2

Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

In Luke's account, Jesus said, "In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back." [Luke 17:31]

When Jesus teaches us something from his word, he warns us not to return to our old opinions. Paul speaks of being clothed with truth and righteousness. "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;" [Ephesians 6:14]

The clothes Jesus refers to in the Olivet Prophecy are symbolic, and they picture the truth, and new understanding, that Jesus gives his saints.

The church is the woman "clothed with the sun" in Revelation 12:1. The sun which clothes her represents the gospel.

The prophet Joel said the sun will be turned to darkness, before the day of the Lord comes. This pictures the gospel being obscured by false teaching. Joel's prophecy was quoted by Peter:

Acts 2:20

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:

Everything that offends, false teachings, and flawed interpretations sown by the devil, that obscure the truth of the gospel, will be burned up at the time of the end.

Matthew 13:43

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

What did Jesus mean when he said the following?

Matthew 24:19

And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

Surely, he was not speaking of pregnant women or mothers with infant children!

Paul wrote to the Christian converts in Galatia:

Galatians 4:19-20

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you."

So Paul pictured these believers as unborn fetuses! And he referred to himself as their spiritual mother! And similarly, those teaching the gospel are *the spiritual parents* of their followers.

The apostle Peter refers to believers as "babes", and the word of God as "milk." He wrote:

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." [1 Peter 2:2]

Jesus meant those who teach the word of God to others, when he referred to "them that give suck." He was not referring to mothers and pregnant women and girls being in special danger, or their suffering physical discomfort.

Why would Jesus pronounce woe to the preachers and teachers of the word? Because he referred to the time when the spirit of Christ will expose the false teachings that have made the Church desolate!

Jesus said,

Matthew 24:32-33

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

Summer pictures a time of opportunity, when crops become fruitful, and grow. In the same chapter Jesus said, "Pray that your flight is not in the winter." [Matthew 24:20]

In the context of the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus refers to summer and winter, the "summer" and "winter" are contrasting seasons. Between summer and winter comes the time of the harvest. There are many references to the resurrection of the saints as a "harvest." For example, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus said,

Matthew 13:38-40

The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

Winter follows the season of the harvest. This is why Jesus said "pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:" [Matthew 24:20] Winter is a figure of the judgment, which in Revelation 7:14 is called a time of "great tribulation."

And the sabbath day also represents God's rest, that the saints labour to enter, Hebrews 4:3-11.

To have to flee in the "winter" or on the "sabbath" means one has been "left behind" when the harvest of the righteous occurs. For them, the prophecy of Jeremiah will come true:

Jeremiah 8:20

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.

The harvest is in the fall, and it is the hope of all Christians, to be included the resurrection of the saints.

Several scriptures represent the church as a bride preparing for a wedding, and Christ as the bridegroom.

Revelation 19:7

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

Jesus often referred to himself as the bridegroom in his parables.

Matthew 9:15

And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

In the parable of the 10 virgins, which is part of the Olivet Discourse, the 10 virgins wait for the bridegroom to come. The cry went out at midnight, and the ones who were ready went in to the marriage, but the 5 foolish virgins missed out, and the door was shut. [Matthew 25:10]

From the mount of Olives, the temple across the valley dominated the scenery. Jesus was well aware of the symbolism of the temple when he foretold its destruction. Jesus referred to himself as the temple of God.

John 2:18-21

Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.

In the NT, the temple of God represents the church. [Ephesians 2:19-21] In the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus indicated the temple was to be destroyed, and not one stone would remain on top of another. This came to pass when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. The Romans, it is said, burned the temple, and so they melted the gold, which ran down onto the stones, and afterwards the gold was recovered from the stones.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus referred to the abomination of desolation as in the future, and since in the New Testament the temple of God is the Church, Daniel's prophecy applies to the Church. As in the time of Antiochus IV, the temple of God was made into a Zeus temple. In the present age the Church has also become desolate. The reformers recognized idolatry, and false teachings, in the Church of their time. The saints are scattered, and the light of the gospel does not shine as clearly as it should. But at the end of the age, Jesus Christ will reveal himself in his Church.