

The Olivet Discourse, Part 1: Two Events Separated by a Gap of Time¹

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Introduction. Significant controversy surrounds the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse of Jesus, given in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Some believe that almost the entire discourse is about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, while others think that almost the entire discourse is about a future tribulation that will be experienced by Jewish people in the last seven years before the Lord returns. I believe, along with many interpreters throughout the ages, that the Olivet Discourse contains prophetic speech about two different events separated by a gap of time: the destruction of the temple that took place some forty years after Jesus delivered the discourse; and the Second Coming of Christ for the Last Judgment, accompanied by the general resurrection, that is to occur at the end of the world. I came to this conclusion after making a few observations.

The Disciples Asked and Jesus Answered Two Questions. The first is an observation about the disciples' questions and Jesus' answer to those questions. Jesus and the disciples were leaving the temple and some of the disciples were marveling about the magnificent buildings of the temple in Jerusalem (Matt 24:1; Luke 21:5). Then Jesus told them that a time will be coming when not one stone will be left upon another, but every one of the stones will be thrown down (Luke 21:5). Then later in private, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus two questions

¹ This article is a revision of a portion of a lecture by Dr. Gumerlock entitled "The Parable of the Fig Tree, Mark 13:28-33" given at the NCT Conference on Eschatology in Franklin, Tennessee in July 2016.

about his remark. The first was: *When* will these things happen? That is recorded in all three Gospels. The second is: *What will be the sign* that they are about to take place? (Luke), that they are about to be fulfilled? (Mark). Matthew has: *What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*

The disciples asked two questions: a “when” question and a “what” question. The “what” question had two parts: a) What will be the sign that the toppling of the stones of the temple will take place? And b) What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? In Jesus’ answer to both the “when” question and the “what” question, there are indications that he was referring to two different events. One was the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem when not one stone will be left upon another. The other was His coming and the end of the age.

Jesus’ Answer to the Question of When. Concerning the question of “when,” about the destruction of the temple, Jesus answered it. Matthew and Mark say, “*When* you see the abomination of desolation” those in Judea should flee to the mountains. Luke 21:20 records Jesus as saying, “*When* you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near.” It is very clear: You will know *when* the temple is going to be completely destroyed, *when* you see armies surrounding Jerusalem, which Matthew and Mark call the abomination of desolation. When they see that, they should flee to the mountains. So Jesus answered the “when” question regarding the destruction of the temple.

But about the “when” of His coming and the end of the age, Jesus does not tell them. Rather, he repeatedly says that it is not for them to know. In Matthew 24:42, he says: “Keep watch because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” It is specifically about the Lord’s coming. In Matthew 24:44, he says: “So you also must be ready, because the Son of

Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Again, it is clearly talking about the coming of Christ. People will not know the “when” of this event. In Matthew 24:50 in the Parable of the Faithful Servant, he says: “The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.” It is also about the Master’s coming, and they will not know the “when.”

So, Jesus did answer the “when” about the destruction of the temple, but about His coming, he tells them that the “when” is unknown.

Indications of a Gap of Time. In the Discourse, Jesus many times indicates that there will be a gap in time. It can be argued that when the disciples asked their questions about when the destruction of the temple will happen and what will be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age, they thought both would take place at the same time. But Jesus gives indications in his discourse that these would be two different events, separated by a gap in time.

In Luke 21:24, Jesus says: “They will fall by the sword and be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” There is mention of this “times of the Gentiles.” In Mark 13:34 & 35, in the Parable of the Fig Tree, Jesus says: “It’s like a man going away” and after some time coming back. In the Parable of the Faithful Servant, in Matthew 24:48, the wicked servant says, “My master is staying away a long time.” In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, in Matthew 25:5, it says: “The bridegroom was a long time in coming.” Then in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14, he says: “It will be like a man going on a journey.” So, there are at least five statements in the discourse where Jesus indicates that there would be a significant gap of time. This, I believe, is because Jesus was referring to two different events, the destruction of the temple and His Second

Coming at end of the world, between which there would be a significant gap in time. After the destruction of the temple, there will be “the times of the Gentiles.” During that time it will be like a man going away, like a master staying away a long time, and like a bridegroom who was a long time in coming. And then at an hour we do not know, Christ will come in the clouds with power and great glory and execute the Last Judgment.

Conclusion. In the Olivet Discourse Jesus was replying to two questions that His disciples asked. In the questions themselves there is mention of two different events, the destruction of the temple and the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of the age. Jesus told them the “when” of the destruction of the temple, but concerning the “when” of His Second Coming he repeatedly said they were not to know. There are also many indications in the discourse that there would be a gap of time, which he called the “times of the Gentiles.” These observations indicate to me that our Lord’s Olivet Discourse has prophetic information about two different events: the destruction of the temple, which occurred in the first century; and the Second Coming of our Lord, which is yet future.