

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 24:1 - 24:3



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this study by Steve Gregg, the focus is on Matthew 24:1-3, which describes a discourse on the rising of nations against each other and the destruction of the temple. Gregg notes that the events described in the discourse had already taken place by the time Matthew wrote his gospel. The disciples' questions about when these things would happen and what sign would indicate their occurrence provide insight into their desire for Jesus to set up his kingdom on earth. However, Jesus warns that the end of the age will not be signaled by these events alone but by the breaking of his covenant and the disobedience of his followers.

### Transcript

In today's study we begin a look at one of the most fascinating chapters in Matthew. It is Matthew 24, which contains what most Christians refer to as the Olivet Discourse. So called because Jesus gave this discourse on the Mount of Olives.

It is the discourse of the Mount of Olives or the Olivet Discourse. This discourse was made after Jesus walked out of Jerusalem, or out of the temple actually, and denounced it and said that it was going to be destroyed. The disciples came to him and asked him some questions about the nature of what he had predicted and he gave the answer.

This discourse is very well known. It has many things about it that appear to coincide with the book of Revelation. In fact, interestingly enough, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the Olivet Discourse, but the Gospel of John does not record it and some have felt that the book of Revelation is John's version of the Olivet Discourse.

Which is not to say that it was his attempt to record the Olivet Discourse, but rather since God revealed these things to John on Patmos and covered the same material, John, later writing the Gospel of John, did not include the Olivet Discourse having already written the book of Revelation. That is a possibility. In any case, this is the discourse that is often thought to describe the end times, or the end of the world, or the second coming of Christ, or the Great Tribulation.

This is that discourse that speaks of nations rising against nations and kingdoms against

kingdoms. It refers to famines, pestilences, earthquakes in various places. It refers to false messiahs and false prophets coming.

All of these things and more are in this discourse. And we live in a time where there is a great fascination among Christians, and maybe even among non-Christians, with the subject of end times prophecy and the signs of the times. And when Christians talk about the signs of the times, more often than not, they're referring to something that they have read either in the book of Revelation or in this discourse of Jesus, the Olivet Discourse.

Now, I personally understand the Olivet Discourse quite differently than is the common and popular way to understand it today. Now, it is not for lack of having considered the other view. As a matter of fact, I taught the popular view for many years.

It was my opinion that in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus described a brief period of time prior to the second coming of Christ, what's usually called the Tribulation Period. As I grew older and read the Scriptures more carefully, and especially as I compared Scripture with Scripture, and also as I became familiar with relevant history of the period, it became clear to me, at least, that this discourse occurred. That is, the things in it have already happened.

Jesus said they would happen in that very generation, because near the end of the discourse, he says, Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things be fulfilled. The reference there to this generation resembles the reference in the previous chapter where Jesus said to the Jews, all these things will come upon this generation. And he was there referring to the fact that in 70 AD, the Romans came and destroyed Jerusalem.

Now, the destruction of Jerusalem is also the subject of this discourse. It begins this way, in Matthew 24, Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another that shall not be thrown down.

Now, that's a reference to the fate of the temple. He said the temple will be destroyed. All the stones will be thrown down from the walls of the temple.

Now, this fulfillment occurred 40 years after its prediction. The Romans did treat the temple this way. They destroyed the temple.

They dismantled it. And therefore, Jesus was predicting what happened 40 years from the time he predicted it. The Romans did this to them.

Now, verse 3, 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 will be the sign of your coming and

of the end of the age? This question of the disciples has been interpreted variously by different Christians. Many times we are told that they ask three separate questions. One of them is, When shall these things be? Now, that question would, of course, refer back, since they simply say these things, they're referring to the things Jesus had just predicted.

And what he had predicted was that not one stone of the temple would be left standing on another. In other words, the destruction of the temple. When will that be? Well, in retrospect, we know when that was.

That was in 70 A.D. They did not know when it would be, and therefore they asked. And we would expect Jesus' answer to their question to have something to do with that event. However, their question is extended further.

They say, And what shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? Now, there are some who feel that these are two additional questions to the original. The first question being, When shall Jerusalem be destroyed? These things which Jesus had just predicted. A second question, When would Jesus' coming be? That would be the second coming.

And the third would be, When would be the end of the world? Now, see, the King James Version translates as the end of the world. Now, there are many who think that Jesus will come, but it will not be the end of the world, and there will be a thousand-year millennium after Jesus has come back, and the end of the world, the physical world as we know it, will be after that. And so, if that is so, if the disciples are asking, When will Jerusalem be destroyed? When will Jesus return? And when will the world end? These would be three different questions having three different answers.

There would be three different times for that, according to some who take it this way. I would like for you to think very carefully, though, and open-mindedly, and compare Scripture with Scripture so that we might see what it was the disciples really were asking. Were they asking three questions, or were there two? And what was it they were really questioning? In Mark Chapter 13, we have, of course, the parallel to this in Mark.

And we read in Mark Chapter 13 in Verse 2, And Jesus answered and said to them, Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. Now, as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things will be fulfilled? And then we find Jesus giving his answer here, just as he does in Matthew. Now, notice there's some different detail here of value to us in Mark 13 that Matthew leaves out.

One is that, whereas in Matthew it simply tells us his disciples came to him, in Mark tells us four of his disciples came privately to him. So this discourse was given privately to

four men who had come to him privately to ask their question. They were Peter, James, and John, who are, of course, the regular three that we usually call the inner circle, and then Andrew, who was Peter's brother.

And so these four men came to Jesus and asked him privately. Now, notice here. Here is Mark's version of the question.

We just looked at Matthew's version. In Matthew's version, there seem to be three parts. When shall these things be? And what should be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? Now, the way it's worded in Mark, it says, Tell us, when will these things be? Okay, so far, it's just like Matthew.

Then the second part, and what will be the sign? Okay, so far, that's verbatim with Matthew also, isn't it? Okay, when will these things be and what will be the sign? Matthew 24, 3 begins just that way, but from this point, it diverges in wording because Mark has them saying, What will be the sign when these things will be fulfilled? Now, Mark, therefore, has them asking two questions. One is, when will these things, that is, the destruction of the temple, be? And secondly, what sign will there be when these things are fulfilled? That is, the same, these things, same things. In other words, in Mark chapter 13, there's no mention of the second coming of Christ.

There's no mention of the end of the world. It is just these things that Jesus had already predicted, namely, the destruction of the temple. He said, When will these things be? And what will be the sign that these things will be fulfilled? So, there's like two questions about one subject.

The one subject is these things, namely, the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The two questions are, When will it be? And what sign will there be that it's about to be fulfilled? So, the way Mark has it, though he records the same discourse Matthew does, the discourse is given in answer to only questions about 70 A.D., not about anything else. He describes that the temple will be destroyed.

They say, When will that be? And how will we know it's about to happen? What sign will there be to clue us in? Now, if we look at Luke's parallel to this, in Luke 21, it begins at verse 5. Luke 21.5 says, Then as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, he said, As for these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. This should begin to sound familiar to us now. We've seen that same statement in Matthew and Mark, and now here it is in Luke 21.

Verse 7. And they asked him, saying, Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place? And then he gives the discourse. Now, did you notice the agreement here between Luke and Mark? Both of them agree that the disciples asked two questions about the same subject. The subject

was, Jesus said not one stone be left standing on another.

We know when that happened. History knows when that happened. That happened 40 years after he mentioned it in 70 A.D. The disciples asked two questions about that event.

When will it be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place? Now, those are the two questions. Mark records them, and Luke records them, and then both of them record the discourse. If you were not reading Matthew at all and only read Mark and Luke, you would get the impression that this happened, that Jesus told the disciples the temple would be destroyed.

They asked him, when would it be destroyed, and what sign would there be that it's about to be destroyed? And then he answered them with the Olivet Discourse, which we would assume then would be applicable to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. Well, then why do Christians so often think that the Olivet Discourse is about the end of the world? Well, it is because of, I think, a misunderstanding of the wording of the disciples' question as it is recorded in Matthew. Now, I don't think it's a misunderstanding on Matthew's part. I think modern Christians misunderstand the language, because Jesus spoke in what is called apocalyptic language, and the disciples were Jewish people.

They recognized the language of prophets, and they used that language. Let's look back at Matthew 24-3 for a moment and look at the disciples' question. This is very important in understanding what the Olivet Discourse is about.

When the disciples came to Jesus in Matthew 24-3, they asked him, Tell us, when will these things be? Okay, so far all the Gospels agree on this. They asked, When will these things, the destruction of the temple, be? And then he says, And what shall be the sign? Okay, again, all the Gospels agree. The disciples asked not only, When shall these things be? But also they asked, What will be the sign? But in Mark and Luke, the question is phrased this way, What will be the sign that these things are about to happen? But the way the same statement is worded in Matthew, What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? Now, is it possible that your coming and the end of the age is just another way of saying the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.? If so, then Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree with each other as to what the disciples asked.

If your coming and the end of the age is not the equivalent of 70 A.D., then Matthew does not agree with Mark and Luke as to what the question was. Now, what do you think is the likelihood of Matthew not agreeing with Mark and Luke about this? That depends on your view of Scripture. In my opinion, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all gave accurate reports of what Jesus said, and they therefore agree with each other.

There are times, of course, when they give different details from each other, but I don't believe they disagree with each other. Therefore, what Matthew records the disciples

saying agrees in content with what Mark and Luke say the disciples asked. It's just giving different wording.

Now, by the way, you'll find this to be so in other places, too. For example, in Matthew, we commonly have Jesus referring to the kingdom of heaven. When Mark and Luke record the same statements of Jesus, they record him speaking about the kingdom of God, so that Matthew alone uses the term kingdom of heaven.

Now, either Matthew is giving the exact words of Jesus, and Mark and Luke are giving an equivalent, or Mark and Luke are giving the exact words of Jesus, and Matthew is giving an equivalent. But we must consider that the words of Jesus in all the gospels have the equivalent meaning. We must assume that the kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven are equivalent in meaning, and therefore, in putting either of those phrases into Jesus' sayings, the same content is there.

Now, likewise, if Mark and Luke say that the disciples asked Jesus what will be the sign that these things are about to happen, and in the context, it could only refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and then Matthew rephrases their question or gives their question in different words, what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age, then we have to assume that his coming and the end of the age is equivalent with these things, which was the destruction of Jerusalem. Now, how likely is that to be possible? Well, the part about the end of the age is rather easy to reconcile with the destruction of Jerusalem, because the age in view would most likely be the Jewish age. You see, that Jewish age had begun with Mount Sinai, when God brought Israel out of Egypt.

He gave them a covenant at Mount Sinai, and he warned them in Deuteronomy 28, if you keep this covenant, God will bless you in every conceivable way, but if you depart from this covenant, if you break my covenant, if you don't obey me, then I will curse you in every conceivable way. He gave them fair warning. And then we see in subsequent Jewish history, most of the time the Jews violated the covenant, and they came under God's curse and so forth.

And at one point, Deuteronomy 28 said, and I, God says, I will scatter you out of your land and make you live among the heathen and so forth. Well, that's what happened in 70 AD. It brought an end to the Jewish age.

The Jews were scattered. The ultimate curse that Moses said would come upon them if they violated the covenant was realized. And that ended one age, and a new age began, the age of Jesus, the age of the Messiah.

And the age of the law, the age of the temple, the age of the Jewish order ended. That was indeed the end of the age. The disciples apparently understood that.

Jesus predicted that the temple would be destroyed. They understood that would be the end of an age. Of what age? The age of the temple.

The age of the Jewish religion. And so it would be very normal for them in speaking about the destruction of the temple, to say, well, that sounds like the end of our era, the end of our age. They were living in the Jewish era.

And sure enough, 70 AD did bring an end to that era permanently, according to Scripture. And so there's every reason to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD as the end of the age, as long as we're not artificially importing into that term the idea of the end of the world. The end of the age is not the same thing as the end of the world, depending on which age.

The age of the knights is past, but the end of the world has not come. The age of the patriarchs is over, but that's not the end of the world. The age of Judaism, the age of the temple, the age of the old covenant is over.

That's not the end of the world, but it's the end of an age. And that is the age the disciples were living in. They're basically saying, you are describing the end of the order of all things as we know it, as Jewish people who go to the temple regularly.

You're describing the end of that age. When is that age going to end? When is this termination point you're talking about? So it's easy enough to see how that Mark and Luke can have them saying, what is the sign when these things, meaning the destruction of the temple, are going to take place, and Matthew renders it probably by their actual words, meaning the same thing, what is the sign of the end of the age, of the Jewish age? But what about that part, what is the sign of your coming and the end of the age? Well, of course, that's what most Christians feel is referring to the second coming of Christ, but pause a moment and think, if you would. It was much later than this, I mean at least weeks later, that the disciples stood on this same mountain with Jesus, the Mount of Olives, in Acts chapter 1. And they said to Him, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And He said, it's not for you to know the times and the seasons that the Father has put in His own power.

You'll receive power as the Holy Spirit comes upon you. You'll be my witnesses to the end of the world and so forth. And then Jesus went up in the air to shock them.

They didn't know He was going to ascend into heaven. They thought He might be ready to just set up the kingdom right there on earth. They did not know Jesus was going to go away in this manner, and therefore they didn't know He would come back.

We speak of the coming of the Lord as the second coming because we live after His ascension, and He's been gone for a while. The disciples on the occasion they asked this question did not know that Jesus would ascend into heaven. They did not know He'd be

gone for 2,000 years or so.

All they knew is He was there now. So what did they mean when they said, You're coming? What's the sign of Your coming? I believe that they understood it in the same sense the Old Testament writers understood. After all, these were Jewish men.

They were acquainted with the Old Testament. And when God would bring judgment on a system, the Old Testament frequently spoke of it as God coming or a visitation from God in judgment. In particular, in Isaiah chapter 19, verse 1, there's the prediction of God's judgment on Egypt, which, by the way, was fulfilled when the Assyrians came and destroyed Egypt in all likelihood.

And in that place, the language of the prophet in Isaiah 19, verse 1, says, The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and will come into Egypt. And it goes on to describe the destruction of that nation.

That nation's destruction was not caused by the second coming of Christ. It was caused by the coming of Assyrian armies. And yet God was directing the Assyrian armies to come in judgment against Egypt.

And therefore, it was a judgment from God, and it was described as God, the Lord, on a swift cloud, coming to Egypt. Coming, as it were, riding above the armies that He was sending and coming in visitation of judgment on them. The language of the prophets was commonly recognized in the early Christians.

If Jesus was saying that because of the temples and its leaders' rejection of Him, He was going to have to judge it and leave not one stone standing on another, the disciples might well speak of this as His coming in judgment. After all, in the book of Revelation, several of the churches that Jesus writes to, He threatens to come to them and destroy them, to fight with them with the sword out of His mouth, to come and take away their candlestick, their lampstand from their place. This refers to a judgment that came temporarily upon those churches.

Those churches are not there anymore. He's not talking about a second coming in those places. He's talking about something that happened to them.

The coming in judgment. Now, this is not a visible appearing such as we expect at the actual second coming. This is simply a figurative way in which the prophets spoke, that God comes when a great judgment comes upon someone from God.

It may come through human means, but it is still God's doing, God's coming. And that is what the disciples apparently were asking about if we were to reconcile Matthew's wording with that of Mark and Luke. Well, I'm sure that this suggestion about the meaning of the disciples' question and therefore the implications it has about the meaning of the discourse itself is new and perhaps difficult for many listeners to really



process and certainly to accept.

Let me just say, I don't expect you to accept it all that quickly, but I would like it if you would consider it as we continue in our later broadcast, going through the Olivet Discourse, I would like to demonstrate to you this thesis that Jesus is talking about, 70 A.D.