

# Signs of the End Times: God's Clock Is Ticking Down



*"In the same way, when you see all these things, you can know his return is very near, right at the door."* Matthew 24:33 NLT

Matthew chapters 24-25 are called "The Olivet Discourse" because it was delivered by Jesus to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. Interestingly, as Jesus was talking to His disciples, He was sitting at the very place the prophet Zechariah had foretold the Messiah would stand when He returned to earth to establish His millennial kingdom: *"On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. And the Mount of Olives will split apart, making a wide valley running from east to west. Half the mountain will move toward the north and half toward the south."* Zechariah 14:4 NLT.

The focus of The Olivet Discourse is **Christ's second coming to establish His millennial kingdom on earth**. Bible Teacher, Tim LaHaye, writes:

"It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of our Lord's Olivet discourse found in Matthew 24-25.... We not only consider it to be the most important prophecy of future events, we believe it provides an outline of the future which all other prophetic sections should be related. It is like a clothesline from which all other prophecy should be hung. An understanding of this passage is essential to a right understanding of the Bible's other prophetic passages." *Are We Living in the End Times?* p.29.

## Central lesson

**God is in control and has a plan for the world and our lives.**

### I. How to Respond to the End Times - Matthew 24-25

How are we to respond to these End Times truths? Jesus said we should: (1) Guard against deception (24:4), (2) Don't be alarmed (24:6) or frightened (Luke 21:9), (3) Pray (24:20), (4) Keep watch (24:42; 25:13), (5) Be ready (24:44), (6) Be faithful (24:45; 25:21, 23), and (7) Serve Christ by serving others (25:40).

### II. The Setting of the Olivet Discourse

Jesus and His disciples were leaving the temple in Jerusalem. His disciples were admiring the beauty of the buildings. Jesus said to His disciples: *"...Do you see all these buildings? I tell you the truth, they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!"* Matthew 24:2 (NLT).

Jesus' words came to fulfillment **less than forty years later**. Jerusalem was attacked by the Romans in A.D. 70 under the leadership of Titus, the Roman general. Thousands of Jews were killed, the city destroyed, and the destruction of the temple was complete. Josephus, the Jewish historian, had given his allegiance to the Romans and accompanied Titus to Jerusalem. He was an eyewitness to the city's fall. He writes that fires raged through the city. The flames melted large amounts of gold in the temple which flowed into the crevices of the blocks. The Romans took the temple apart, stone by stone, to recover the melted gold. Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled—*Not one stone will be left on top of another!*

### III. The Disciples' Three Part Question

Jesus' disciples were troubled. They asked Him three questions (Matthew 24:3). The answer that Jesus gave is the longest answer given to any question asked in the New Testament. The three-part question is:

1. **WHEN** will this happen (the destruction of the temple)?
2. **WHAT** will be the sign of your **COMING**?
3. (What will be the sign) of the **END** of the age?

### IV. General Observations about Jesus' Answer

#### 1. Israel was the focus of His answer, not the **CHURCH**.

The church was a mystery when Jesus said these things (Eph. 5:32; 3:6). The church did not exist until the Jewish holiday of Pentecost ten days after His ascension into heaven (Acts 1-2). The Gospel of Matthew was written to the Jews. The nation of Israel is His focus as seen by the references to (1) the temple *"the holy place"* (v.15), (2) Daniel's prophecy about *"the abomination that causes desolation"* (v.15) (3) Judea (v.16), (4) the Sabbath (v.20). In context, the term *"the elect - NIV"* or *"chosen ones - NLT"* (v.22, 24, 31) is not a reference to the church but people who turn to Christ during the tribulation period.

#### 2. The emphasis on **"BIRTH PAINS"** indicates that the signs are an early warning of Christ's 2nd coming, not an immediate fulfillment (v.8).

Birth pains are at the end of pregnancy just before birth. Likewise, these signs will take place just before Christ comes. Birth pains get closer together and more intense just before birth. In the same way, these signs will increase in **frequency** and **intensity** as time moves closer to Christ's 2nd coming.

#### 3. Jesus was focusing on His **RETURN** at the end of the tribulation period to set up His millennial kingdom, not the **RAPTURE** of the church before the tribulation.

Jesus does not refer to the church or the Church Age in The Olivet Discourse. His focus is the tribulation period (24:21-22) and the Second Coming of Christ to the earth (cf. 24:30). However, if the signs for the Second Coming are starting to appear today, the rapture has to be even closer.

#### 4. The signs that Jesus lists will appear mainly during the **TRIBULATION** period although they may begin appearing in the **PRESENT** age.

Many of the signs appear in the present church age and will continue appearing in greater frequency and intensity until their final fulfillment in the tribulation. The signs are listed in **Matthew 24:4-22** and **Luke 21:11-16**. The Apostle Paul also gave a list in **1 Thessalonians 5:1-3**; **1 Timothy 4:1-2**; and **2 Timothy 3:1-5**.

#### 5. The Bible prohibits **DATE** setting for the Coming of Christ.

Although we can know the general time of Christ's coming, we cannot know the exact time (Matt. 24:32-33). The Bible is clear that no one should try to set dates (Matt. 24:36, 42, 44; 25:13; Acts 1:7).

### Conclusion:

**God is in control and has a plan for the world and our lives.**

**Action Steps:** ► Receive Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's Bible study. ► Attend a small group. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus. ► Read Revelation 5. *What do you learn about Jesus?*