

## SIGNS OF CHRIST'S RETURN

### Matthew 24:1-3

Jesus' message in [Matthew 24-25](#) is commonly known as the **Olivet Discourse**. The theme of the discourse is Christ's *second coming* at the *end of the present age* to establish His *millennial kingdom* on earth.

This discourse was prompted by the disciples' question here in [verse 3](#). The answer Jesus gave is the longest answer given to any question asked in the New Testament...and its truths are absolutely essential for understanding the events surrounding His return. It's the *revelation of our Lord...directly from Him...about His return to earth in glory and power*.

#### I. PROPHETIC EVENTS ANTICIPATED:

In order to understand better the disciples' question in [verse 3](#), it's necessary to know something of the *basic hopes* and *aspirations* that the Jews had at that time.

Throughout history, people have always had a strong desire to *know the future*...and the Jews were no exception. They had *an intense interest in the future*...especially since they were tired of being under the domination of pagan oppressors. They were eager for the divinely-promised coming of their Messiah...the one that they anticipated would deliver them from such oppressive rule.

The Jews knew intimately the many Old Testament promises of *future blessing...deliverance...and prosperity*. They knew that the Lord's *Anointed One*...the *Messiah*...the *Christ*...would come and establish the *rule* and *reign* of [David](#) again on earth...a reign of *peace, prosperity*, and *safety* that would never end. The Jews therefore had...and still have today...great hope for the future.

*“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.”*

~Isaiah 9:6-7

*“A shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”*

~Isaiah 11:1-2

*“The Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one...and the people will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security.”*

~Zechariah 14:9, 11

*“...The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.”*

~Daniel 2:44

By the time of Jesus, the Jews had formed in their minds a very clear scenario of how they believed those predicted events would unfold. What's interesting, is that they closely correspond to New Testament *premillennial eschatology* about His second coming.

The major difference is that those Jews had no knowledge of his *coming twice...the first time to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sin of the world...and the second to establish His millennial kingdom on earth*. The Jewish people weren't looking for *deliverance from sin* but for *deliverance from political oppression*.

- **First**...consistent with the teaching of [Zechariah 14](#) and other Old Testament prophecies, they believed that *the coming of the Messiah would be preceded by a time of terrible tribulation*.
- **Second**, the popular eschatology of Jesus' day held that *in the midst of that turmoil would appear an Elijah-like forerunner heralding the Messiah's coming*. It was for this reason that so many Jews were drawn to [John the Baptist](#).
- **Third**, was *the appearing of the Messiah*...and at which time He would establish His kingdom and vindicate His people.
- **Fourth**, would come *the alliance of the nations to fight against the Messiah*. In other words, the unbelieving world will interrupt all its other warfare in order to unite against the Messiah.

- **Fifth**, would be *the destruction of those opposing nations*. All the vast armaments and defenses of the nations will be useless against the Messiah.
- **Sixth**, would be *the restoration of Jerusalem*...either by renovation of the existing city...or by the coming down of a completely new Jerusalem from heaven. The city of the great King would be *pure, holy, and incorruptible*.
- **Seventh**, the *Jews scattered throughout the world would be gathered back to Israel*.
- **Eighth**, *Palestine would become the center of the world*, and all nations would be subjugated to the Lord.
- **Ninth**, the Jews of Jesus' day believed that *with the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom would come a new and eternal age of peace, righteousness, and divine glory*.

In the minds of the Jews of Jesus' day...the time was ready for the Messiah's coming. And when **John the Baptist** appeared and his *appearance* and *preaching* were *reminiscent* of **Elijah**, the people began to anticipate the possibility of the Messiah coming. And when Jesus began His ministry...and His teaching was with unheard of *authority* and with His power to *heal* of every sort of disease... many Jews were convinced that He *was indeed* the Messiah.

## II. **PROPHETIC EDICT ANNOUNCED: (vs. 1-2)**

Jesus had spent all day **Tuesday** of **Passover** week in the **temple**, giving His *last public teaching*...and *pronouncing* His final and most intense *judgment* on the *false religious leaders* and on the *nation of Israel*. He was now on His way back to **Bethany**, by way of the **Mount of Olives**, alone with His disciples.

As they were leaving **Jerusalem**, the disciples were pointing out with admiration the *beauty* and *splendor* of the **temple**. **Herod's Temple** was awe-inspiring by any standard...as noted even by many secular writers of that day (**Roman historian Tacitus**...the **Babylonian Talmud**...**Josephus**).

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him (**vs. 1**)...

*“As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’”*

~Mark 13:1 (Luke 21:5)

And He said to them, **“Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” (vs. 2)**...

The disciples had to have been wondering how such an amazing structure...especially one *dedicated to the glory of God*...could be destroyed, with **not one stone...left upon another**...as Jesus had just predicted.

*How...God's glory had been removed (I Samuel 4:22; Ezekiel 11).*

*Remember*...what Jesus once called *“My Father's house”* was His no longer. Jesus now referred to it as *“your house”* (**Matthew 23:38**).

The *destruction* and *desolation* occurred in **A.D. 70**, when the **Romans** destroyed **Jerusalem**. The only stones left intact were the huge foundation stones.

## III. **PROPHETIC EXPECTATIONS ASKED: (vs. 3)**

Upon leaving the **temple**, Jesus and the twelve left **Jerusalem** through the *eastern gate*, crossed the **Kidron Valley**, and ascended the **Mount of Olives** on their way back to **Bethany**. As they traveled that short distance, all of the disciples had probably discussed the questions that **Peter, James, John, and Andrew** would ask Jesus on their behalf.

*“As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately...”*

~Mark 13:3

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, **“Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (vs. 3)**...

They asked Jesus **two questions**...

- **When will these things happen?** That is...when will the temple be *destroyed* and *not one stone be left on another*?

- **What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?**

For some time the disciples had been convinced *“that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately”* (Luke 19:11).

In fairness to the disciples...even the Old Testament prophets saw the Messiah’s coming and establishing His kingdom *as a single event*. The *church age* was a *mystery* to them.

Even after the *resurrection* the disciples still held to the same expectation.

*“So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’”*

~Acts 1:6

Surely now that Jesus had proved that even *death* had no hold over Him, that it was time to *proclaim* Himself King...*destroy His enemies*...and *inaugurate* His kingdom. They weren’t thinking of Jesus’ *returning*...because they had no idea that He was *leaving*.

#### **LESSONS THAT WE CAN LEARN:**

- The Bible tells us enough so that we can know the plans and activity of God...but...
- It also leaves out enough so that we must live and function by faith.
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