

Is Matthew 24 About End Times

(Notes from slideshow)

End-Time Scenarios

There are many end-time scenarios. That is, stories of what happens up until and including the Last Days.

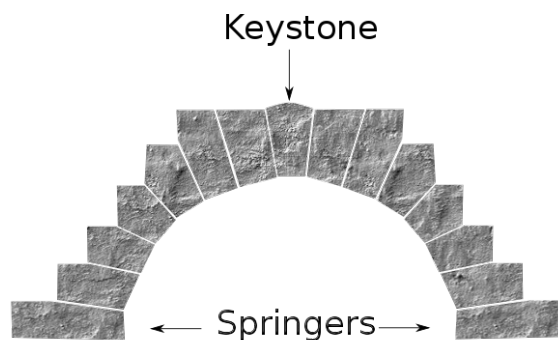
VIDEO: “The Final prophecies” (Integrity Films).....[0:00-3:30], Ch 13 [1:11:36-1:12:52]

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Recently the Lord dropped this into my spirit: “In the big scheme of things, truth doesn't matter, reality does”

For us this means that we can believe something to be the 'truth' but it may not be so in reality. This is the case with end-time scenarios because we won't know the reality of end-time events until they happen.

Let's begin with a look at arches (arches????). The most important stone in an arch made of blocks is the keystone. The Keystone holds all the blocks in place so that the arch remains strong and stable as this diagram shows¹:



Remove the keystone and the arch and the edifice built on it collapses because one item holds it all together. This is what the Olivet Discourse does to end-time theories.

The Olivet Discourse

The 'Olivet Discourse' in Matthew 24 is the keystone or linchpin that holds the puzzle pieces of eschatology together. Remove this piece of 'prophetic' text from the structure of biblical end-time prophecy and it all falls down. It only stays together because of this text.

Let's examine the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and understand it from it's context.

When on the Mount of Olives it's recorded that Jesus' disciples asked him a question. This is also recorded in Mark 13 & Luke 21.

What question?

- When will these things happen & what are the signs?

¹ – SOURCE: commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25450165

What things?

- Jesus had been with his disciples in the temple setting the Jewish leaders 'straight' Jesus talked to the Jewish leaders about their hatred for the real things of God. He told the people about the dismantling of the temple. He prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

Jesus had already told them that because of their evil: They were witnesses against themselves that they were the sons of those who murdered the prophets and that they would be accountable for the blood of all the righteous prophets every shed on the Earth.²

Luke 11:48-51 (NKJV) – *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' that the blood of all the prophets which was shed...from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah... Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.*

i.e. From Genesis to 2 Chronicles. The 1st and last book in the Hebrew canon.

Jesus had lamented over Jerusalem, telling the Jewish leaders that: “Their house would be barren (empty)”³

Luke 13:34-35 (NKJV) – *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate”*

Concerning the temple building, Jesus told his disciples: that not one stone would be left one on top of another. They'd all be thrown down.⁴

Luke 21:5-6 (NKJV) – *Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, “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.”*

Jesus then told them they'd know when it was going to happen just as they know that summer is coming by ALL the trees budding. He also told them they would still be alive when it happened.⁵

Luke 21:29-32 (NKJV) – *“Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that **the Kingdom of God is near**. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place.”*

Note this

Oh, **BTW**: Israel is pictured in the OT as an olive tree, not a fig tree.

Jerusalem Warning

By 35AD Jerusalem was a city occupied by Rome. The Jewish leaders had much liberty to run the city for the Romans. The temple was the focus of the city and the city was dedicated to Judaism – not to Jehovah.

The 'Olivet Discourse' was a warning to the Jerusalem church to prepare for the destruction of the city. God was about to deal with the Jews permanently.⁶

2 – Luke 11 (Matthew 23)

3 – Luke 13:34-35

4 – Mark 13:2

5 – Luke 21:29-32

6 – Matthew 23:29-24:44 (Read in context with Matthew 23:1-28)

Don't believe me? He had warned them about it in the past:

2 Chronicles 24:20 (NKJV) – “*Thus says God...Because you have forsaken the Lord, He also has forsaken you.*”

Fulfilment

Rome laid siege to Jerusalem for 3½ years. The city fell in 70AD with 1.1 million Jews killed. Every believer in the city escaped beforehand. The temple was looted and destroyed at that time. This had occurred within one “generation”.

The temple was eventually dismantled stone-by-stone by the Romans in 135AD. In 135AD the diaspora of the Jews was begun by the Romans. They were driven out of their Judean homeland and forbidden to ever enter Jerusalem on the pain of death.

Analysis of Discourse

Did this all happen in the life-time of the hearers as Jesus stated? Or, was he speaking figuratively in some way about the far distant future?

Let's check it out.

- **Numerous Messiahs:** A number of men rose up to liberate the Jews from Rome in a messianic fashion e.g. Simon bar Giora, John of Gischala; Eleazar ben Simon
- **Wars and Rumours of war:** Rome kept the peace (pax romana) throughout the empire. But there were revolts and the threats of revolt in Israel and Judea by the zealots and 'wanna-be' messiahs.
- **Numerous earthquakes:** The few years just prior to the fall of Jerusalem was a time of unusually high seismic activity. The most famous earthquake was the destruction of Pompeii in 63AD. The writers of the period record earthquakes at Colossae, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Crete, Samos, Laodicea, Heirapolis, Campania, Rome and Judea.⁷
- **Famine:** The 46-47AD famine in Israel and Syria in the time of Emperor Claudius was disastrous.⁸
- **Great persecution:** The Jewish leaders tried to exterminate the believers following the Spirit's creation of the ekklesia.⁹ Roman persecution began with Nero in 64AD and didn't cease until 313AD with the Edict of Milan.
- **False prophets:** There were many of these among the very early believers. John and Peter both lament this in their writings.¹⁰
- **Apostasy:** Judaizers & ex-pagans were the worst of those who were causing believers to 'fall away'. Then came the Gnostics. They arose as soon as the gospel came to Greek-minded people. By 150AD about ⅓ of all Christians were involved in gnosticism.¹¹
- **The gospel preached to the 'whole' world:** This had occurred, according to Paul.¹² How come? Jesus referred to the civilized world, not the whole globe. He used *oikoumen* not *kosmos*.
- **Tribulation:** 70AD was greater than the holocaust – ⅓ of the Jews died in Jerusalem. Many others in Judea also. Lots taken away as slaves.
 - “*When Jerusalem was destroyed, a genocide of Jews was triggered throughout the*

7 – “Victorious Eschatology”

8 – Acts 11:28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 (Also Luke 23:28-29)

9 – Acts 8:1, 12:1

10 – 1 John 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1

11 – “Victorious Eschatology”

12 – Romans 1:8, 10:18, 16:25-26; Colossians 1:5-6, 23

surrounding regions. Josephus said: 'There was not any one Syrian city which did not slay their Jewish inhabitants, and were not more bitter enemies to us than were the Romans themselves.'" ¹³

- **False Christs:** Josephus wrote about many.¹⁴
- **Signs & Wonders:** Josephus wrote about them - e.g.¹⁵
 - A star resembling a sword appeared over Jerusalem
 - A light appeared around the temple for ½ an hour
- **The sun, moon and star perplexity:** This was a Jewish idiom that a city/nation had or was to come under judgement and destruction. It was figurative language. See examples in OT.¹⁶
- **All the tribes of the Earth will mourn:** This is actually an ambiguous statement. It can be translated like this which fits the 1st Century incident: “All the tribes (Israeli) of the land (Judea) will mourn” - viz. when they see the destruction their city and temple.¹⁷ This because the Greek word in the manuscript for earth is *ge* not *kosmos*.
- **Flee to the mountains when signs appear:** Refers specifically to Jews¹⁸ – viz:
 - Those in Judea
 - Problem with the Sabbath
 - Living on roof tops
 - Jerusalem surrounded by armies
 - “When you see...”
- **The abomination of desolation:**
 - “when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near” ¹⁹
 - “in the holy place”²⁰ = 'sacred locality' – i.e. Jerusalem, not temple
 - 'Abomination' = 'detestable' or 'foul' thing – i.e. Romans were a detestable thing in the citadel
- **The abomination of desolation as spoken of by Daniel the prophet:**
 - “And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.”²¹
 - “And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.” ²²
- **Sign of the Son of Man:** What was the sign for them that the Messiah was now in Heaven on his throne?
 - The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple – his judgement
 - This occurred immediately after the tribulation of that time.²³
- **The Son of Man in glory:** This happened in Heaven (not 'sky') as the Son took his place on the throne as the King of his Kingdom.
 - Daniel saw this in a vision.²⁴
- **Angels gathering the elect:** Once the King was on his throne, it was appropriate that his angelic workers would begin bringing people into his Kingdom from all over the world.²⁵

13 – “Victorious Eschatology”

14 – “Victorious Eschatology”

15 – “Victorious Eschatology”

16 – Ezekiel 32:7-8; Isaiah 13:10; 34:4-5

17 – “Victorious Eschatology”

18 – Mark 13; Luke 21

19 – Luke 21:20

20 – Matthew 24:15

21 – Daniel 9:26

22 – Daniel 11:31

23 – 1 Peter 3:22

24 – Daniel 7:13-14

25 – Acts 2:39

Kingdom Expectations

Jesus' followers were expecting him to set up his Messianic Kingdom on King David's throne in Jerusalem and rid the nation of the Romans. The disciples knew that Elijah (i.e. John the Baptist) had already come so the Messiah could appear at any time. The request for James & John sit at his side in his kingdom²⁶ highlights their expectation of an imminent, earthly kingdom.

Even after Jesus rose back to life they still had the idea he would set up his earthly kingdom right then and there.²⁷ Jesus replied to their question of his imminent enthroning:

Acts 1:7-8 (NKJV) – *“And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

- 'Earth' in this verse is *ge*: meaning 'land', 'territory' not 'world'
- 'End' in this verse is *eschatos*: meaning 'outermost part'

So, Jesus wanted them to wait for the Spirit to be released so they'd get all the understanding they needed. In the meantime he spent 40 days teaching them about the Kingdom.²⁸

When the Spirit was given to them in Jerusalem at Pentecost, they then were able to fully understand the concept of the Kingdom and when it would come in its fullness.²⁹ Now they knew that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ), but he was seated on his throne in Heaven, not on Earth in Jerusalem. All power and authority was now his.³⁰

Remember this?

Luke 21:29-32 (NKJV) – *“Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that **the Kingdom of God is near**. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place.”*

The Kingdom would come shortly after they saw the signs, and in the lifetime of those alive at the time when Jesus told them about it

Matthew's Account

Matthew records that the disciples asked 3 questions:³¹

1. When will this happen?
2. What are the signs of your coming?
3. What are the signs of the end of the age?

Matthew 24:3-6 (NKJV) – *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?” And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you...See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

Note: The “coming of the Lord” was understood by the Jews to refer to God coming in judgement.

26 – Acts 2:30

27 – Acts 1:6

28 – Acts 1:2

29 – Acts 1:2

30 – Acts 2:32-36

31 – Matthew 24:3

Note: They understood “Last Days” & The End” to refer to the final judgement against them – it was called the “Day of the Lord”.

All 3 writers record almost exactly the same answer from Jesus. So there were different questions, but the same answer. That means the 1st two questions are about the same scenario as the single question: i.e. The destruction of Jerusalem and it's temple.

The Remainder?

What about the rest of Matthew 24? What is it referring to?

When the disciples spoke of "the END of the Age" (v:3), the Greek word for 'end' is *sunteleia*. This word means 'consummation' - i.e. the end of the all things when Jesus returns.

When Jesus spoke of "the END" (v:6, 14), the Greek word for 'end' is *telos*. This word means 'termination', 'closure', or 'conclusion' – i.e. the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of Israel's contract with God.

So, Matthew 24:35-25:46 are about the return of the King to bring judgement on individuals from all the nations. This is the 'Consummation of All Things'.

What do those verses actually tell us?

- No one knows the day or the hour
- Watch and remain ready
- Be about his work when he comes
- We'll all give account to our Master
- The Judgement Seat – separation

Notice there's no command or injunction to focus on, plan for, or predict the King's return. That's not part of Kingdom living.

Second Warning

The book of Revelation was a second warning to the Israeli church and those in the region to prepare for continued persecution before it stopped through his intervention. It was also an encouragement from the Lord Jesus to persevere.

(An analysis of revelation is for another time)

Time to shake your theology again.

Eschatology

Eschatology (the study of End Times) is a case where our belief influences our full acceptance of the Kingdom. There are 3 main views of end-time Bible prophecy:

- Futurist – all at the end
- Preterist – mainly in 1st Century
- Historist – played out over history

Each of these can't be correct (reality). However, each is believed to be the 'truth' by their proponents.

Most believers today are Futurists, where as those in the past were Preterist. The view today is thanks to Scofield's Bible of 1909 and the 'Tim LaHayes' of the last 40 years.

Preterists believe that the Olivet Discourse was a warning to the first church of the destruction of Jerusalem, not a prophetic message about the lead up to the end of things. They also believe that Revelation was an epistle to the 1st church in the Middle East and Asia Minor, not a prophetic vision of the end of things

Conclusion

You have freedom to choose:

- Futurist prophecy, or
- Preterist fulfilment

You also free to even choose:

- End-time prophecy
- Historic prophecy,
- Unfolding prophecy, or
- Cyclical prophecy

The Futurist position leaves you here:

- Looking desperately forward to the Millennial Reign
- Not living in the full manifestation and reality of the Kingdom today because it's in the future

IMPORTANT

- Think through what I've presented and don't write it off.
- Don't say "But..." and defend your pet theology on biblical prophecy.
- Don't start defending your stance.
- Be prepared to change. You are not rejecting the Bible, only your interpretation of it.
- Defending your position is irrelevant.
- Our King is looking for those who are searching for reality, not knowledge-based 'truth'.

Do you have lots of questions about this? Sorry. I don't have all the answers.

Laurence

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Resources

Ralph Woodrow (1966) “Great Prophecies of the Bible”

- Secondhand book: Available from Amazon
- Order book: From the author for \$8US here: www.ralphwoodrow.org/books/pages/prophecies.html
- An excerpt from the book's chapter 7 “When shall these things be” here:
www.preteristarchive.com/PartialPreterism/The_Anti-Rapture_Page/matt24.htm