

The Olivet Discourse – An Introduction

End Times

Reprinted from *eParousia* #8, September, 2003

Jesus and His apostles spoke often of the Second Coming, future judgment and end-time events. In fact, all but 4 of the 27 books of the New Testament speak of the return of Christ. The most complete end-times teaching of Jesus recorded for us is the Olivet Discourse, recorded in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13 and Luke 21. It is called the Olivet Discourse because Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives when He gave it. In this teaching, Jesus answers His disciples' questions about the sign of His coming and the end of the age.

When we take Jesus' teaching in the Olivet Discourse at face value, we discover it presents a chronological and thorough description of events that will precede His coming, and how we are to live in light of His certain coming. Matthew 24:1-3 gives us the setting:

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.

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."

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?"

(Matthew 24:1-3)

The disciples asked Jesus three questions:

1. When will these things happen? (i.e. 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?

We will see that Matthew only records Jesus' answer to the disciples' final two questions, and that in reverse order. Luke 21 on the other hand, deals with both the near term destruction of Jerusalem and the eschatological destruction that is tied to the Lord's return.

Your Coming

The noun most often used in the New Testament to speak of the coming of Christ is the same word used in verse 3 by the disciples – *parousia*. This word is used 24 times in the New Testament, 16 of those occurrences referring to the Second Coming of Christ. The basic idea of the word is "coming," "arrival" or "presence." The context determines if the focus is on the arrival or the continuing presence.

The writers of the New Testament tell us to that the parousia of Christ is what we are waiting for: Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the **coming** of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the **coming** of the Lord is at hand (James 5:7-8).

And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His **coming** (1 John 2:28-29).

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His **coming**, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power (1 Cor 15:22-24).

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the **coming** of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:15-17).

Another word used in the New Testament to speak of Christ's return is *epiphaneia*. *Epiphaneia* means "appearing" and is used six times in the New Testament, all by the apostle Paul. Five of these references speak of the future appearing of Christ. Christ's *epiphaneia* is what we are looking for: I charge you in the presence of God, ...that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the **appearing** of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:13-14).

...looking for the blessed hope and the **appearing** of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus... (Titus 2:13).

The final word I want us to look at is the word *apokalypsis* or "revelation." This is the title of the last book of the Bible and is used 18 times in the New Testament. Six times it refers to the Second Coming of Christ. The apostles tell us that the *apokalypsis* of Christ is to be our eager expectation: ...so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the **revelation** of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:7-8).

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the **revelation** of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).

...but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the **revelation** of His glory you may rejoice with exultation (1 Peter 4:13).

There are those who want us to believe that each of these words refers to a different phase of Christ's Second Coming. The *parousia* is said to be when Christ comes "for His saints" at the rapture, and the *epiphaneia/apokalypsis* refers to when Christ comes "with His saints" in judgment at Armageddon. But, as we can see from even a cursory reading of the above Scriptures, no such distinction can be made from the usage of these Greek terms. The "coming" of Christ is at his "appearing" when He is "revealed" and when "every eye will see Him" (Rev. 1:7).

End of the Age

In addition to the sign of Christ's coming, the disciples asked about the sign of the "end of the age." Just what is the end of the age?

This term, "end of the age," is used 4 times in the New Testament besides here in Matthew 24. All of the references are in Matthew's gospel.

And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the **end of the age**; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the **end of the age**" (Matt 13:37-40).

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the **end of the age** (Matt 28:19-20).

In Jesus' explanation of the parable of the wheat and tares, He explained to the disciples that the end of the age is the time of the final harvest. The righteous (wheat) and wicked (tares) will be separated; the wheat goes into the barns and the tares are bundled for burning.

In the Great Commission of Matthew 28 Jesus told His disciples that He will be with them until the end of the age. That is, our worldwide ministry of evangelism and discipleship will continue until the end of the age. Thus the end of the age includes the time when Christ returns to rapture His bride, ending our mission on earth, and begins His judgment of the wicked.

Next month we will continue our study in Matthew 24 and begin to look at Jesus' answer to His disciples' questions.

This article was originally published through eParousia, Sola Scriptura's monthly end-times e-newsletter