

## Signs of the End (Part 1)

### Matthew 24: 3-14

Today I want to begin a study on what is known as the Olivet Discourse. Jesus spoke these words in His last days prior to the crucifixion in response to the disciples' questions regarding His return and the end of the age.

These verses have been discussed and debated for centuries. There are varied doctrines and theologies concerning the end times and the exact order of these events. While it is not my desire to debate or deal with those issues in this study, there is much that we can learn from the words of our Lord regarding His return and the climate within the world preceding His return. I will say that most Baptist agree that the church will be raptured prior to the beginning of the Great Tribulation and those seven years of suffering and devastation will happen prior to the Lord's return to establish His kingdom during the Millennial Reign.

In order to properly discern the words of our Lord, we must approach the Olivet Discourse literally. As Jesus spoke to the disciples, He spoke to men who had been taught of the coming of Messiah through the Old Testament prophets. Their view, since it was based in Scripture, was similar to the New Testament view in many ways. However, there was a major difference – most viewed the Lord's coming as a single event. They believed when Messiah came, He would establish His kingdom then. They did not see the coming of Christ in two events – His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, followed by His literal return to the earth at the end of the age. His prophetic words in verse two concerning the Temple would be fulfilled in 70AD as the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. As we approach this discourse, we must do so with the understanding that Jesus spoke entirely of events that would happen in the future.

While I would never make a prediction regarding the time our Lord will return, and reject such predictions as heresy, we can see the stage being set globally for His coming. As we begin, I want to examine the [aspects](#) of time revealed as we consider: [Signs of the End](#).

**I. A Time of Social Discord (4-7a)** – Jesus warned of the social division and deception that will transpire at the end of the age. We must bear in mind that all of this will culminate during the Great Tribulation, but we are clearly seeing the promotion and advancement of these events today. Consider:

- **Jesus warned of Deception (4-5)** – *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. <sup>[5]</sup> For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.* During the tribulation the anti-Christ will come on the scene, deceiving and uniting the world, but

Jesus warned of many false Christs and prophets leading up to and during that time. These will speak with passion and deceive many. **Matt.24:24 – For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were possible*, they shall deceive the very elect.** Even some of the saved by grace will be tempted to believe their message of deception. We have witnessed the rise and fall of many charismatic leaders throughout history. Hitler deceived the Germans leading up to, and during World War II. In modern times, men like Jim Jones and David Koresh claimed to be Messiah and gathered a following of believers. Dictators in certain countries have a god-like status before their people and are followed with unquestioned devotion. Such deception will continue to increase as we approach our Lord's return.

➤ **Jesus warned of the continual threat and presence of war (6-7a) – And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet.** <sup>[7]</sup> **For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.** The Jews certainly knew the heartache and hardships of war. At this moment they suffered under Roman domination. Since the Northern Kingdom had been conquered by the Assyrians and the Southern Kingdom by the Babylonians, they had not known real peace. Sadly, this trend has continued since the days of Christ upon the earth. There have been few days of peace upon the earth. In my lifetime we have experienced war in Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq, and we have been at war with terrorists' regimes since 2001. Civil war has ravaged parts of Africa for decades. Syria has endured civil war and unrest for years. Ukraine is embattled in an ongoing war with Russia for territory. China and India are in a standoff, threatening attacks. Today we face the threat of war with North Korea, Iran, Russia, and even China. Israel faces continual attack from the Palestinians and those sympathetic to their cause. ISIS continues to attack, terrorize, and brutalize anyone it deems a threat to their agenda or loyal to Israel or the Christian faith. These things must come to pass, and yet the end is not come. Clearly the stage is being set for the Lord's return!

**II. A Time of Natural Disasters (7b-8) – and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.** <sup>[8]</sup> **All these *are* the beginning of sorrows.** Jesus also warned of global natural disasters that will increase in number and severity as we draw near to His coming. Everything Jesus had mentioned up to this point would be just the beginning of sorrows. These are mere signs that we are getting close to the end. He warned of:

➤ **Despair (7b) – there shall be famines.** This is not something our world has never known, but the famines that result in mass starvation and death continue to plague our world. One would think with the advancements made in planting, production, harvesting, and transportation that this would be decreasing in our modern day, but the Bible is being fulfilled before our eyes. This will certainly increase during the Tribulation as the Lord unleashes the seals of judgment, but we are

beginning to see its devastation today. According to the World Hunger Project, 795 million people – one out of nine in the world – do not have enough to eat. Almost half of the deaths in children under five are attributed to some form of malnutrition.

➤ **Disease (7b) – there shall be...pestilences.** Jesus warned of the increase of disease and associated death as we draw near to the end. As you study the Revelation, we discover that 25% of the world's population will die at one time, but there is much to come prior to that horrific event. There seems to be no end to the reports of disease and death throughout our world. One of the greatest carriers of disease is mosquitos. In recent months we have learned of the devastation and dangers associated with the Zika virus. I read just the other day of fleas in Arizona being diagnosed as carriers of the same bacteria that caused the Black Plague in Medieval Times. Even with great advancements in medicine and treatments we continue to see outbreaks like the recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa. AIDS continues to its rampant march of suffering and death. These will continue as we near the end.

➤ **Devastation (7b) – there shall be...earthquakes in divers places.** Jesus also warned of earthquakes hitting in many areas throughout the world. The USGS estimates there are several million earthquakes each year. Many of these go undetected because they occur in remote areas without proper detection devices or they are very small on the Richter scale. The world has recorded earthquakes throughout history, but these are just another sign of the beginning of sorrows.

**Conclusion:** I had hoped to be able to cover our text verses today, but there is more here than we could deal with in a reasonable amount of time. I hope to finish this first passage next week, but I hope you sense the urgency revealed in these verses. No man knows the day or the hour our Lord will return. He may not return in our lifetime, but the signs are certainly pointing toward His soon coming.

I have not shared these verses to generate an attitude of fear, but to provide insight for the Lord's return. He fulfilled every prophecy concerning His first coming, and He will return just as He said He would. As we consider these verses, and the great difficulty they reveal, it is possible to have hope in these last days. While I am aware of our time, I am not fearful. I have placed my faith and trust in the Lord, being saved and secured in His grace. He has gone away to make provisions for the saved in heaven. He will come again, and the most important thing we can do today is prepare to meet Him. If you have never been saved, I urge you to respond to the gift of grace, repent of sin, and believe in Christ by faith unto salvation. If you are saved, I hope you too sense the urgency of our day. Those who are saved will enjoy eternity with Christ and those who

die in their sin will face the righteous judgment of God in hell. If there is a need, come while there is time!