

Session 1

April 24, 2022

STAND STRONG TO THE END

Matthew 24:1-14

Matthew 24 and 25 record Jesus' *Olivet Discourse*, an orderly explanation of the End Times given to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. In the week leading up to the crucifixion, it seems that Jesus would spend the mornings in the temple, generally disputing with the religious leaders. The afternoons were likely spent outside the city, relaxing in the shade of the groves that dotted the area surrounding the city. It was during one of these respites that Jesus gave His most explicit explanation of what the future holds.

While the Olivet Discourse is a major text about the End Times, we must keep in mind that it is not the *only* text! Remember: End Times prophecy is painted in very broad strokes, covering over a thousand years of future events. Therefore (and contrary to popular belief!), coming to rock-solid conclusions about what exactly will happen, to whom, and when, is next to impossible. But one thing is certain: Jesus is coming back...and He wants us to be ready!

Questions (vv. 1-3). What prompted the discourse was the disciples' fascination with the temple itself (v. 1). With multiple courts, hallways, porticoes, pillars, stairs, and gates, the gleaming, walled temple complex covered nearly 35 acres of property. It was by all accounts the pride of the Jews and the splendor of their holy city Jerusalem. No wonder the disciples (from up north in Galilee) were so impressed! And no wonder they were so stupefied by Jesus' antagonism toward it (v. 2). His stinging retort brought the twelve to Him quietly and privately for further explanation. Notice from the start that His disciples saw His prophetic remark as something far in the future. Thus, they asked, "When will these things happen? And what is the sign of Your coming and *of the end of the age*?" They could not fathom that such a magnificent structure as the temple, and the entrenched religion so associated with it, would crumble anytime soon. Yet forty years later, that's exactly what happened. For reflection: *Why do you think God allowed the temple to be destroyed? Do you think the temple was an evil place? Why or why not?*

Cautions (vv. 4-8). Notice that Jesus never answered their first question (regarding *when*) but answered fully the second (regarding the *signs*). He begins with three. First, there will be *religious unrest*. Many will come claiming to be the returning Messiah and deceive many (v. 5). Second, there will be *political unrest*, with conflicts and wars and even rumors of wars (vv. 6-7). Third, there will be *cosmic unrest*, with natural disasters like famines and earthquakes in all kinds of places (v. 7). Yet Jesus seemed somewhat unconcerned. The disciples should be well aware of what is happening, but they were not to be *alarmed*. These things must take place, Jesus said, and they represent not the end, but the *beginning* of the end. The metaphor of *birth pangs* (v. 8) is interesting. Like the birthing process, the sufferings the disciples would endure signaled significant changes were in the works. And they would increase in both *frequency* and *intensity* until the end was reached. For reflection: *Why do you think Jesus gave no time frame to these events? What seems to be His intention in these verses?*

Consequences (vv. 9-14). For events that should not be alarming, these next verses seem rather...alarming! Notice the harsh and rapid increase in sufferings. Next comes persecution, death, hatred, betrayal, lawlessness, and coldness. These are descriptive of the final years of the

Great Tribulation (mentioned in the next set of verses). Jesus ends this section with two important pronouncements. First, those who are faithful till the end will be delivered. And second, the gospel must go out to the entire world before the culmination of the age. Hence, there are two challenges: faithfulness in the believers' *walk*, and faithfulness in the believers' *witness*. For reflection: *Some say verse 14 means that Christ is waiting on us to complete the Great Commission before He can return. What is the problem with this interpretation? What else might Jesus mean here?*