

This lesson covers a portion of what is commonly known as the Olivet Discourse, so named because Jesus spoke it while on the Mount of Olives facing Jerusalem. The discourse is prophetic and describes conditions and events that will happen shortly before Christ's return. The things Jesus describes are of particular interest in light of current events happening now in the Middle East.

The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) each record the Olivet Discourse, with Matthew's being the longest account (Matthew 24-25) and Luke's being the shortest (Luke 21:5-36).

1 And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!

Matthew says it was "the disciples" who wanted to show Jesus the buildings of the temple complex, but Mark tells us that the conversation was initiated by one unidentified disciple. One commentator was convinced that this disciple was Judas Iscariot, who was a lover of money, that was admiring the richly ornamented stones and beautiful architecture of the buildings. Another believed it was Peter, who frequently spoke for the disciples as a group. The identity of this disciple is apparently not important since the Bible did not give us his name.

2 And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

Jesus cautions the disciples to not become enamored with these beautiful buildings since they were not going to be permanent. Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple some 40 years later in A.D. 70 when the Roman general Titus ransacks Jerusalem and destroys the temple. Jesus' prediction that no stone would be left stacked upon another was fulfilled because the Romans had heard a rumor that there was gold hidden between the stones of the temple, motivating them to separate every stone in search of it.

3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?

"And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple" – After leaving the temple and the city of Jerusalem, Jesus climbs the Mount of Olives and finds a place to sit where He can see the temple in the distance.

"Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately" – These four apparently approach Jesus first to ask a question, but no doubt the other disciples are there to listen to Jesus' answer (Matthew 24:3). They ask the question "privately" because only Jesus and His disciples are there. There are no crowds present at this time.

"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" – "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" is the message that Jesus has been preaching (Matt. 4:17) and the message that He had sent them out to preach (Matt. 10:7), so the disciples believed that Jesus would soon be setting up His kingdom. Hearing that the temple would be destroyed confused them and made them curious as to when it would happen if Christ's kingdom on earth would soon be established.

5 And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you: 6 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

The Greek grammar behind "began to say" could mean that Jesus began to speak of all the things that He tells them in this discourse. It could also be read as "began by saying." If that is the intended meaning, it means that Jesus began the discourse with a warning that He deemed to be very important. He warns that many deceivers will come along that will claim to be Christ and that many people will believe them. Those that believe these false Christs will obviously be those who have no spiritual discernment because they do not study scripture and have not been born again. The ultimate deceiver will be the Antichrist who will attempt to deceive the world into believing that he is the Christ. Some deceivers, particularly the Antichrist and his false prophet, will be very convincing. Only the fact that God's chosen are protected by Him will prevent them from being deceived (**Matt. 24:23-24** "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. 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").

7 And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.

There have been wars throughout history, but the frequency of wars and their intensity will increase as the time of the end approaches. These are part of the "labor pains" (v. 8). When we see wars, Jesus encourages us not to worry since they have always been a part of human history. The occurrence of wars alone is not the sign of the end of this age but they will increase in frequency toward the end.

8 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" – The increase of aggression between nations are a sign that things are leading up to the end.

"and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles" – Natural disasters are also a sign that the end of this age is approaching. Even though they, like wars, have always occurred, the frequency and intensity will increase as the day of Christ's return approaches.

"these are the beginnings of sorrows [labor pains]" – Jesus compares the increasing frequency and intensity of the pains of childbirth to the way the signs of His return will also become more frequent and intense before His arrival. The arrival of these signs are merely the beginning of the wars and natural disasters that will happen before Christ returns. Much of this increase in frequency may happen in the latter half of the tribulation.

9 But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. 10 And the gospel must first be published among all nations.

“But take heed [watch over; be on guard] to yourselves” – After describing the types of things that will happen on the world stage (false Christs, wars and natural disasters), Jesus gives the disciples a personal warning to protect themselves. They (and us) will face dangerous opposition as witnesses of Jesus Christ, particularly during the Tribulation period.

“for they shall deliver you up to councils [sanhedrins]; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten” – The “councils” are the various sanhedrin courts attached to local synagogues. The responsibility of these councils were to enforce Mosaic Law and punish teachers of heresy. Those found guilty would be beaten according to Mosaic Law (Deut. 25:2-3). Jesus is warning His disciples that the Jews will reject their witness of Him and their councils will find them guilty and carry out sentence against them. The book of Acts records that this indeed happened in the early church.

“and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them” – Witnesses of Jesus Christ will be brought before rulers and kings, either because of a desire on the part of the ruler/king to hear the gospel or because the ruler/king did not like what was being preached. Jesus says that when this happens, it is an opportunity to testify of Jesus “against them” (or “before them” – the Greek allows for either translation). Proclaiming Jesus Christ to these rulers and kings may fall on deaf ears, or it may result in their salvation.

“And the gospel must first [first in time; first in rank or importance] be published [proclaimed] among all nations” – The Greek word behind “first” can mean “first in rank,” giving this line the meaning that the proclaiming of the gospel to all nations should be of paramount importance. However, Matthew’s parallel account supports the chronological meaning when it quotes Jesus as saying that the gospel must be proclaimed to all nations before the end of the age can come (**Matt. 24:14** “*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come*”). This may happen through men preaching throughout the world but commentators suggest that this may be accomplished by angels during the Tribulation: **Rev. 14:6-8** “*And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.*”

11 But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.

“But when they shall lead [to arrest; to take away] you, and deliver you up” – Jesus is zeroing in on the inevitable occasions when believers will be arrested and delivered up to the authorities to answer for themselves.

“take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate” – Jesus tells them not to plan out what they will say in their own defense nor rely on their own abilities. Some have tried to use this statement as an excuse for a lack of study and preparation when called upon to preach, but the context here is concerning the specific situation when they have been arrested for the sake of Jesus Christ and must give an account of themselves.

“but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost” – In such a circumstance, they are not to depend on their own cleverness in responding to the authorities but depend on the Holy Ghost to give them what they should say. The Holy Ghost can give a better defense and glorify Jesus Christ much better than they ever could.

12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.

Betrayal by family members because of the testimony of Jesus Christ no doubt has happened throughout history, but it will become more frequent in the final days before Christ’s return. During the Tribulation period, the hatred of the gospel will be so intense that there will be family members who, due to either fear or hatred of the gospel, will betray and turn in their believing family to the Antichrist’s authorities. Those identified as believers in Christ will be executed. **Rev. 6:9-11** “*And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*”

13 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake” – Because men hate Jesus Christ, that hatred will be transferred to those to represent Him on the earth. Anyone who preaches Christ or even simply believes on Him will become a target of this hatred.

“but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” – To endure to the end means that you never gave up and turned your back on Christ because of the persecution you suffer because of Him. Jesus is not saying that we can earn our salvation by “toughing it out.” Rather, He is saying that only those who have been truly born-again will be able to endure to the end with the help of the Holy Spirit. Those who were merely following Christ out of convenience will turn away once the going gets too rough for them.

Mark 8:34-35 “*And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.*”