

Their Questions

Olivet Discourse Sermon #2 of 14, December 7, 1997

By [David Curtis](#)

[Matthew 24:3](#)

This morning we want to look at the disciples' question to Jesus in verse 3 of Matthew 24. Matthew 24, commonly known as the Olivet discourse, is by far the most full and explicit of our Lord's prophetic utterances regarding His second coming. Verse 3 is the most important verse in this whole chapter. If you don't understand their question, you will never understand Jesus' answer. We must be sure we understand the questions.

The way many deal with these questions is a good example of how our paradigms can blind us from seeing certain truths. If, in your eschatological paradigm, you see the second coming of Christ as the end of the physical world, a cataclysmic, earth burning, total destruction of life as we now know it, you will certainly miss what Jesus is saying here. Because life goes on, you can't believe that Jesus returned as he said he would. It just won't fit your paradigm. Let's begin by looking at a verse that shatters the paradigm that views the second coming as the end of the world.

[2 Thessalonians 2:1-2](#) (NKJV) Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. ³ Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

Now, if the Thessalonians believed that the nature of the second coming was an earth burning, total destruction of planet earth, how could they be deceived about its arrival? If the Second coming was, as many view it today, Paul could have written them and said, "Look out the window, the earth is still here so the Lord has obviously not come." They thought it had already happened, so they must have viewed it differently than most folks today do.

Let's see if we can understand the disciples' questions; then we will be able to understand Jesus' answer. Correctly understanding this question could cause a paradigm shift in the eschatology of many.

Let me briefly remind you of what we saw last time. Throughout Matthews' gospel Jesus continually warned the Jews of their coming judgment because of their apostasy. I believe that most, if not all, of Jesus' parables deal with the kingdom of God or the destruction of Jerusalem because of their rejection of that Kingdom. As we move closer to chapter 24, we notice the building of the judgment theme.

[Matthew 21:43](#) "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

[Matthew 22:7](#) "But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

Jesus continues to warn them of a coming judgment because of their rejection of the Messiah. It is clear that the reference here is to Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70.

Matthew 23:37-39 (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 chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! ³⁸ "See! Your house is left to you desolate;

By "house," he was referring to Jerusalem, and certainly the temple was included. The word "desolate" is the Greek word eremos; it means waste, desert, desolate, solitary, or wilderness. The city and the temple were both destroyed in AD 70.

Now, with this in mind, we move into chapter 24 and the Olivet discourse of Jesus. In verse 1, as they depart from the Temple, the words of Jesus, "*Your house shall be left to you desolate,*" still burned in their ears. In verse 2, Jesus predicted that this massive temple would be utterly destroyed in an act of God's judgment.

Matthew 24:3 (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?"

The Mount of Olives was just east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley. It is about a mile in length and about 700 feet in height, and overlooks Jerusalem, so that from its summit almost every part of the city could be seen. It was from Jerusalem about a Sabbath day's journey.

Acts 1:12 (NKJV) Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

A Sabbath day's journey was as far as the law allowed (not the law of Moses, but that advanced by the Jewish teachers) one to travel on the Sabbath. This was 2,000 paces or cubits, which would be not quite one mile.

This walk, uphill with sandals, would have taken them maybe 15-30 minutes. During this time they were no doubt thinking about what Jesus had just said about the destruction of the temple and how their house would be left desolate. Once Jesus sat down on the mountain, the disciples approached him and questioned him about the temple's destruction. According to Mark 13:3, the questions were asked by Peter, James, John, and Andrew. Matthew and Mark say they came "*privately.*" In both Matthew and Mark this is used to set the disciples apart from the crowds, not from each other. I think that this means that they were the ones who raised the questions, not that they were the only disciples present.

Their question was two-fold. **First** they ask, "*when will these things be?*" All three of the synoptic gospels ask, "**when.**"

Matthew 24:3 (NKJV)...."Tell us, when will these things be?"....

Mark 13:4 (NKJV) "Tell us, when will these things be?"....

Luke 21:7 (NKJV) So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be?"...

The "*these things*" refers to the temple's destruction in verse 2. In verse 1 the disciples point out the temple buildings to Jesus. In verse 2, Jesus says, "All' these things' shall be destroyed." It should be clear that they are asking, "WHEN will the temple be destroyed? When will our house be left desolate?" After all Jesus had just said about judgment on Jerusalem, and then about not one stone

not being left upon another, the disciples' response is, "When?" That makes sense, doesn't it? I would hope so. It is the second part of their question where things get sticky.

The **second** part of their question is, " *What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age.*" To help us understand the question, we need to compare all three synoptic gospels.

Matthew 24:3 (NKJV)... " **And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"**

Mark 13:4 (NKJV)"And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"

Luke 21:7 (NKJV) "And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?"

Comparing all three accounts shows us that the disciples considered **His "coming" and "the end of the age" to be identical events with the destruction of the temple.**

Mark 13:4 (NKJV) "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"

Notice in the first part of the verse he says, "*When will these things be?*" -- referring to the temples' destruction. Then in the second half, he asks, "*What will be the sign when all 'these things' will be fulfilled?*" The sign of His coming and the end of age was the same as the "these things," which referred to the destruction of Jerusalem in the year AD 70. These are not separate questions that can be divided up into different time-events. The disciples had one thing, and only one thing, on their mind and that was the destruction of the temple. **With the destruction of the temple, they connected the coming of Messiah and the end of the age.**

Listen to what some have done to the disciples' questions. Ryrie says this, "In this discourse Jesus answered two of the three questions the disciples asked. **He does not answer 'When will these things happen?'** He answers, 'What will be the sign of Your coming?'"

John Walvoord in his commentary on Matthew, says this, "Matthew's gospel does not answer the first question, which relates to the [destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.](#)"

Their main question was, "WHEN?"; and Ryrie and Walvoord say the Lord doesn't even answer it. He ignores their question about the destruction of the temple and he proceeds to talk about a far distant, 2,000 plus years, coming and end of the world. Does that make sense to you? More important, would it make sense to them? I think not!

They associated the destruction of the temple with His coming. The Greek word for "coming" is *parousia*, which means arrival, not return. The disciples could not have been asking about a future return of Christ, because they had no idea that he was leaving. They believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Matthew 16:15-16 (NKJV) **He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"** ¹⁶ **Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, (Messiah) the Son of the living God."**

They believed that Messiah would come and rule, they had no idea of Him coming, then leaving, then coming again.

[John 12:34](#) (NKJV) The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ (Messiah)remains forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"

Jesus talked to them about his death and going to the Father, but they did not understand it at all.

[John 13:33-36](#) (NKJV) "Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. 34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." ³⁶ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward."

[John 16:16-17](#) (NKJV) "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." ¹⁷ Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?"

This account in John takes place after he had given them the Olivet discourse and they still didn't understand that He was leaving them. After the crucifixion, they still didn't understand that Jesus was going to rise from the dead.

[John 20:8-9](#) (NKJV) Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. ⁹ For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

Now let me ask you a question, "If they had no idea that Jesus was going to leave them, why would they ask Him about His return?" They didn't understand anything about a second coming. You might ask, "Why did they ask, 'what will be the sign of your coming,' if they didn't think He was leaving?" Good question. The answer is in understanding the Jewish concept of the *parousia*. As I said, the word meant arrival or presence, and not return. It didn't refer to any future return of Christ. To the disciples the "**[parousia](#)**" of the son of man signified the full manifestation of His Messiahship; His glorious appearing in power. William Barclay says of *parousia*, "It is the regular word for the arrival of a governor into his province or for the coming of a king to his subjects. It regularly describes a **coming in authority and in power.**"

The disciples were accustomed to hearing Jesus speak of His coming in His kingdom, coming in His glory and power, and that within their lifetime.

[Matthew 16:27-28](#) (NKJV) "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. ²⁸ "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

They didn't know he was leaving, but they looked for a time when he would appear in full glory and power bringing in the Kingdom and rewarding every man. Some try to explain this verse as relating it to the transfiguration or Pentecost. But the verse says it would be a time when every man would be rewarded for their works. That cannot refer to the transfiguration or Pentecost but it does refer to his second coming, as can be see from:

[Revelation 22:12](#) (NKJV) "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

Compare that with Matthew 16:27. They knew that His parousia would be in their life time, and they looked for, and expected it. Even after His resurrection, they questioned him about the restored kingdom.

Acts 1:6-7 (NKJV) **Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"⁷ And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.**

They didn't understand that Christ would sit upon his throne by means of His resurrection and ascension.

Acts 2:29-33 (NKJV) **"Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.³⁰ "Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne,³¹ "he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.³² "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.³³ "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.**

Christ was now reigning on the Father's right hand and the manifestation of that kingdom would come, when Christ would come in judgment on Jerusalem.

Acts 2:34-35 (NKJV) **"For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand,³⁵ Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"**

Now, you might ask, "Why would the disciples connect the destruction of the temple with Christ's parousia?" The disciples knew the Old Testament and they knew that the destruction of Jerusalem would usher in Messiah's kingdom.

Zechariah 14:1-5 (NKJV) **Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, And your spoil will be divided in your midst.² For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.³ Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle.⁴ And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south.⁵ Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee As you fled from the earthquake In the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, And all the saints with You.**

In the day of the Lord, Jerusalem is destroyed and the Lord comes with his saints. Also, look at:

Daniel 9:26 (NKJV) **"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; 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.**

The disciples believed that the coming of Messiah would be simultaneous with the destruction of the city and the temple.

Notice that they also associated the destruction of the temple with the end of age.

[Matthew 24:3](#) (NKJV)... “And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

[Mark 13:4](#) (NKJV)... "And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"

[Luke 21:7](#) (NKJV)... "And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?"

Now again, the "these things"-- the destruction of the temple, are connected with the end of the age. Some translations render this "world." That is very confusing. The Greek word used here is *aeon* which means, "age." It is not the Greek word "*kosmos*" or "*oikoumene*," which mean the world and its inhabitants. It is not talking about the end of the physical world; the word *aeon* means age, era, or a period of time. The expression "*end of the age*" refers to "the end of the Jewish age." The disciples knew that the fall of the temple and the destruction of the city meant the end of the Old Covenant age and the inauguration of a new age. William Barclay says, "Time was divided by the Jews into two great periods-- this present age, and the age to come. The present age is wholly bad and beyond all hope of human reformation. It can be mended only by the direct intervention of God. When God does intervene the golden age, the age to come, will arrive. But in between the two ages there will come the Day of the Lord, which will be a time of terrible and fearful upheaval, like the birth-pangs of a new age." Remember from Zechariah 14 that the "Day of the Lord" and the destruction of Jerusalem were connected.

William Hendriksen, in his commentary on Matthew, says this about 24:3, "The very form of the question is cast -- the juxtaposition (a putting or being side by side or close together) of the clauses -- seems to indicate that, as these men interpret the Master's words, Jerusalem's fall, particularly the destruction of the temple, would mean the end of the world. In this opinion they were partly mistaken, as Jesus is about to show. A lengthy period of time would intervene between Jerusalem's fall and the culmination of the age, the second coming."

He sees that by the form of the question, they viewed the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the age to be simultaneous. But he says they were wrong. Were they wrong? If they were mistaken, why didn't the Lord correct them? Why didn't the Lord say the temple will be destroyed soon but the end of the age is a long way off? What Jesus did tell them was that all the things they asked about would be fulfilled in their life time.

[Matthew 24:34](#) (NKJV) "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."

To the Jews, time was divided into two great periods, the Mosaic Age and the Messianic Age. The Messiah was viewed as one who would bring in a new world. The period of the Messiah was, therefore, correctly characterized by the Synagogue as "the world to come." All through the New Testament we see two ages in contrast: "This age" and the "age to come." The understanding of these two ages and when they changed is fundamental to interpreting the Bible. Most Christians believe that most all of the New Testament prophecies deal with a time **future** to us. When they read in the New Testament the words "the age to come," they think of a yet future age. But the New Testament writers were referring to the Christian age. We live in what was to them the "age to come," the New Covenant age.

Let's look at some scriptures that talk about these two ages.

Matthew 12:32 (NKJV) "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

The word "come" at the end of the verse is the Greek word *mello*, which means "about to be." We could translate this, the "age about to come" (in the first century). Many think that the age to come will be a sinless age; not according to this verse. Sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in that age, referring to the age of the New Covenant, our present age.

Matthew 13:49-50 (NKJV) "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just,⁵⁰ "and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Notice who is taken -- the wicked. Is this a reverse rapture? I believe this speaks of the Judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70. It was the end of the Jewish age, and the wicked Jews were burned in the destruction of Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 2:6-8 (NKJV) However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The wisdom and rulers of that age were passing away. He is speaking of the Jewish leaders and the Old Covenant system.

1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV) Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Paul said very plainly that the end of the ages were coming upon them, the first century saints.

Hebrews 1:1-2 (NKJV) God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

Jesus was speaking in the last days. Last days of what? The last days of the Old Covenant age.

Hebrews 9:26 (NKJV) He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

When was it that Jesus appeared? He was born not at the beginning, but at the end of the ages. To suppose that he meant that Jesus' incarnation came near the end of the world, would be to make his statement false. The world has already lasted longer since the incarnation than the whole duration of the Mosaic economy, from the exodus to the destruction of the temple. Jesus was manifest at the end of the Jewish age. Peter says the same thing.

1 Peter 1:20 (NKJV) He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you

Jesus came during the last days of the age that was the Old Covenant age, the Jewish age. That age came to an end with the destruction of the temple in AD 70. All the things prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24 occurred at the end of that age. Nothing is taught in the Bible about a millennial age. The Bible talks about "this age"-- the Old Covenant age, and the "age to come"-- the New Covenant age. The millennium was the time of transition between "this age" -the Old Covenant age, and the "age to come"- the NOW present New Covenant age.

You and I live, in what was to the writers of the New Testament, the age to come. We are no longer under the Old Covenant, we live in the Messianic age of the New Covenant.

The age we live in will never end, it is an everlasting age.

[Hebrews 13:20](#) (NKJV) Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

The Bible doesn't teach about an age future to us. The age in which we live is the everlasting age of the New Covenant. Jesus' disciples believed that His presence would be acknowledged, and so would the end of the age when He arrived in judgment on Jerusalem. They were thinking of the temple and the immediate future: would He speak to them of the world and the indefinitely remote?

F.C. Cook in his commentary says this, "From the **form of the question** we may infer that two separate events, the destruction of the temple, and the final coming of Christ at the end of the world, **were closely connected together in the minds of the disciples.** The popular belief of the Jews at this time seems to have been that the coming of the Messiah would be simultaneous with the destruction of the city and temple" (Emphasis mine, D.B. Curtis). Cook sees them as two separate events but admits that the disciples didn't. I think he sees them as separate because his paradigm of the Second coming blinds him.

So we have seen that the disciples questions all revolved around the temple and its destruction. To them the destruction of the temple would mean the parousia of the Lord and the end of the age. The answer that Jesus gives is to THEM, not some future generation, and it all deals with the fall of Jerusalem. You must keep this in mind as we look at Jesus' answer to their questions. We'll begin to look at Jesus' answer next week.

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on December 7, 1997.