

Are Church Age Saints in The Olivet Discourse?

A Biblical Explanation of Matthew 24-25
The Pre-Tribulational View Verified



COOPER P. ABRAMS III, Ph.D.

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By Cooper P Abrams III, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

This book, with all my years of ministry and study, is dedicated to my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who forgave all my sins and has given me eternal life. Paul stated regarding his ministry, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; (1 Timothy 1:12) Note Paul did not say he was worthy of being used of the Lord, but rather counted faithful. Although I have failed many times during all these many years, my desire and determination has always been to be faithful and never to compromise God's Word.

I realized the truth that John 1:1 states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) Jesus is the literal very Word of God and to compromise, distort, and not be faithful in my studies, preaching and teaching of the Word, would be degrading the very Person of my Savior Jesus Christ, because He and His Word are synonymous.

Further, I am grateful to the many teachers I have had over these many years who taught me both in person and their writings.

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Are Church Age Saints in the Olivet Discourse?

A Biblical Explanation of Matthew 24:1 - 25:46

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The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24-25, without a question, is one of the most misunderstood and subsequently one of the most misinterpreted passages in the New Testament. Often overlooked is the subject of the discourse in which Jesus was answering the questions of His disciples about the end of the age. The discord has come from not understanding what age the Lord was describing which is the context of His statements. The result has brought forth various eschatological views such as the Pre-Wrath, Mid, and Post Tribulational and a host of other contradictory theories that have caused great confusion among today's Christians. Paul plainly states, "For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." (1 Corinthians 14:33) Therefore, the problem is not that God has not made the passages clear, but that man has applied a faulty interpretation.

The heart of the problem is that many interpreters have not applied sound rules of hermeneutics and have made the serious mistake

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of mixing God's plans and purpose for Israel with that of the Christians in this the Church Age.

This book is a verse by verse, careful exegetical examination of the Olivet Discourse that shows that Church Age saints are not present during the Tribulation. Further, it demonstrates that the New Testament teaches the Pre-Tribulation rapture of Christians in this dispensation.

All believers of all ages are saved the same way by faith in the Jesus Christ. The Old Testament saints were looking forward to His redemptive work in the future as God had promised. Church Age believers are looking back to the coming and finished work of Jesus Christ in suffering and dying for the sins of the world. Yet, God makes a distinction between how He works with Israel and also Christians in this age. God has a different plan and purpose for Christians in this age that is distinct from the Old Testament. God is not finished with His chosen people and the Old Testament dispensation. If this truth is ignored and not applied in the interpretation of Matthew 24-25 the results will produce a misconception of the events of the end times.

The Lord's Olivet discourse deals with the end of the Old Testament age or dispensation in which Jesus lived. All four Gospels record events that occurred in the Old Testament period. That dispensation isn't completed, but was put on hold

temporarily until the time of the Gentiles is finished. (Luke 21:24) This is a vital truth that must be considered in interpreting the Lord's message on the Mount of Olives. God will once again start His prophetic clock and finish the 490 years of Daniel's prophecy in the coming 70th Week that is the coming seven-year Tribulation.

It is a common mistake in interpreting Matthew 24-25 to conclude that this passage is written to describe the end time events of the present church age. Instead, these events are actually a description of the coming seven-year Tribulation. It is a mistake to interpret them as being a part of the current Church Age.

False Views Espoused from a False Interpretation

For example, because of the similarities of Matthew 24:40-41 with the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, some have concluded that this is the rapture of believers in the Church Age and places it within the Tribulation. They then preclude that Christians will be on earth and will be present through part of the Tribulation. This interpretation causes them to establish the rapture in the chronology of the seven years. The offshoot of this has been a Pre-Wrath, Mid, Post Tribulation rapture. Ignoring the sound biblical principles of interpretation causes great confusion concerning Christ's coming for Christians at the rapture, and with His Second coming at the end of the Tribulation. The details of the rapture and the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation are clearly different.

Other related views espoused are the Post and Amillennialism based on their false understanding of Matthew 25:31-46. Both of these views teach there will not be a literal 1000-year reign of Christ in the Kingdom as Revelation 20:4-6 describes. Further, they discount God's promises of the Kingdom to Israel. They assume this passage to

be describing a single end time judgment with the saved or sheep on one side and the lost or goats on the other side referred to as the "Sheep and Goat Judgment." This interpretation does not take into account the BEMA judgment of 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 for Church Age saints and the final judgment of the unsaved at the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. The result of these false views has caused a shadow over the Lord's discourse and biblical eschatology.

The Purpose of this Paper

The following is presented as a response to explain hermeneutically that these are incorrect views and Matthew 24-25 supports the Pre-Tribulation rapture and Pre-Millennial view of eschatology. A correct interpretation will show that the Church Age saints are not in view in the Christ's Olivet Discourse.

The context of the Olivet Discourse is established by Matthew 24:3. It is critical in interpreting a passage of God's word to fully understand the context in which Jesus' statements are made. The context establishes who Jesus was addressing, when the address is made; the subject of His discourse; and the historical and cultural situation at that time.

Critical to understanding Matthew 24-25 is realizing the disciples knew nothing of this present Church Age and their questions were addressing the end times as related to Israel. Jesus in Matthew 16:18-19 had prophesied of the establishment of His *ekklesia*, but did not give them further details until after His resurrection as Acts 1:1-8 records. (This will be addressed later)

Clearly, on the minds of His disciples was the end of their present period of the Old Testament when the Messiah would restore the Kingdom to Israel. This was why the disciples asked their questions. To understand this, one must take into consideration the preceding events the disciples had witnessed.

They had seen Jesus weeping over Jerusalem as Luke 19:41-44 recorded in which He predicted the 70 A.D. destruction of the city. They witnessed His purging of the Temple of the money changers. They repeatedly had heard His teaching and parables and had witnessed the violent response of the chief priests and scribes. Jesus had spoken of the alarming details of the destruction of the Temple and coming events.

Luke then records a shorter but parallel account of the Olivet Discourse. Luke 21:5-7 states the context of the disciple's questions. "And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Luke 21:5-7)

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Jesus had consistently presented Himself to be the promised Messiah and the disciples were aware that He said he was the Messiah. They heard Him affirm He was the Messias to the Samaritan woman. “The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiahs cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.” (John 4:25-26)

Mark records that Jesus attested to this at his trial before the high priest, “But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:61-62)

The Two Questions Answered by the Lord in Matthew 24-25

The disciples asked the Lord the two specific questions, ". . . what shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world." The word, "coming" is *parousia*, and basically means, "presence" or "arrival." (See 1 Cor. 16:17, 2 Cor. 7:7) The "*parousia*" refers to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, at the end of the age. Jesus will come and purge the earth of sinners and then fifty days later begins the Millennium which is the promised Kingdom to Israel.

The word translated "*world*" is the word *aion*, and means "age or a period of time." The question the disciples asked was, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (*this present period*)?" The age when Christ preached the Olivet Discourse was the period just prior to His crucifixion, which was the Old Testament dispensation. This is the period Jesus was explaining. The present dispensation of the Church Age had not begun. The "age" refers to Israel's history and the end of the Old Testament dispensation. This is not referring to the coming rapture of the Church Age

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saints in this the "*ekklesia aion*" (Church Age) which He instituted forty days later after His ascension as Acts 2 records.

In understanding Jesus' discourse, we need to determine and be clear as to what "age" He was referring. To properly interpret the passage nothing must be "assumed" but the interpretation has to be based on the evidence in the discourse and on all pertinent scriptures.

The Old Testament period is stated as being 490 years in Daniel's prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. Note what Daniel stated, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." (Daniel 9:24)

The Jews were in Babylon in captivity and they were concerned about Israel's future and the fulfillment of God's promises to them. (V24) Daniel's prophecy was God's assurance that He was not finished with them and would accomplish His purpose for them. This prophecy stated that in 490 years God would restore their Kingdom and the Messiah would reign. This would end Israel's

transgression, put an end their sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring everlasting righteousness. Daniel foretold the period would end with "the vision and prophecy sealed", meaning accomplished, and the *most Holy*, the Messiah, would be anointed, referring to the Second Coming and His subsequent setting up of the Kingdom. All these events will end in the final days of the Old Testament dispensation which is Daniel's 70th week.

The "age" the disciples were asking about was the end of the Old Testament period when God would restore Israel under their Messiah. Many falsely conclude that the age Jesus is talking about involves the Church Age, and that He was addressing New Testament believers. However, the context and statements Jesus made negate that being the case. The age He speaks of here is the end of the Old Testament dispensation which is finalized at the end of the Seven Year Tribulation. The seven years will end the Old Testament dispensation with the Second Coming of Jesus the Messiah and His fulfilling His promises to them. Currently, today we are in an interval period that is our present Church Age, which is sandwiched in between the end of Daniel's 483 years and before Daniel's 70th Week. Israel was a nation which is distinctively different from a local New Testament church. This will be explained in detail later.

Christians in this Age are the Body and Bride of Christ

Clearly Christians are not present or mentioned in the Tribulation events of Matthew 24-25, nor in Revelation 4-19. Christians in the present age relate to the seven years, but Jesus' discourse is not addressing them. Yes, an innumerable number of people will be saved during the Tribulation which will include Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 24:14). But these saved people will be the last of the Old Testament saints saved, and not Christians who are the body of Christ. The New Testament repeatedly establishes this truth:

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

“For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body?

But now are they many members, yet but one body.” (1 Corinthians 12:14-20)

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”

(Romans 12:5)

“Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Ephesians 1:23)

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” (Ephesians 5:30)

“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:” (Colossians 1:24)

“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:” (Romans 12:4)

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Israel is never referred to as Christ's body. The body of Christ is unique to the believers in this Church Age. Further, believers in this dispensation are referred to in Revelation as the Bride of Christ.

"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." (Revelation 21:9)

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17)

The rapture will end the present Church Age and when the seven-year Tribulation begins God will once again begin His prophetic clock and finalized Daniel's 490 years. Nothing in the New Testament, when properly interpreted, can be understood as placing Christians of this present dispensation within the Tribulation. The Tribulation is a Jewish event. However, the Bible is clear that many Gentiles will be saved during the period having believed on Jesus Christ. They will be saved Old Testament saints, but not part of the Body of Christ.



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The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24-25, without question, is one of the most misunderstood and subsequently one of the most misinterpreted passages in the New Testament. The result is that various views such as the Pre-Wrath, Mid and Post Tribulational have brought great confusion among today's Christians.

At the heart of the problem is that interpreters do not apply sound rules of hermeneutics and make the grave mistake of mixing God's plans and purpose for Israel with that of the Christians in this the Church Age.

This book is a verse by verse, exegetical examination of the Olivet Discourse, which shows that Church Age saints are not present during the seven years of the Tribulation. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the New Testament teaches the Pre-Tribulational rapture of Christians at the end of the current dispensation of the Church Age.

Although the shed blood of Jesus Christ saves all believers, God makes a distinction between how He works with Israel and with Christians in this age. God is not finished with His chosen people Israel, the Old Testament dispensation and Daniel's prophesied 490 years to the Second Coming. (Dan. 9:24) Daniel's 70th Week is the Tribulation and God's completion of the end of the age, which is the Old Testament dispensation. He will then establish the promised Kingdom to Israel.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus answers the questions of His disciples about the details of Daniel's 70th Week and His Second Coming. Jesus' discourse shows conclusively that Church Age Saints are not viewed in Matthew 24-25.

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