

# Factors Related to the Olivet Discourse

## Factor 1: The Relationship of the Church to the Discourse

The disciples longed for the day when they would reign with their Lord in His kingdom, but before that day would come, He had an important task for them to accomplish. They were to be the “*foundation stones*” of Christ’s Bride, the Church with Him as the head or “*corner stone*.” According to the Apostle Paul, the church would be...

*...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;*

Ephesians 2:19b, 20

Since Matthew’s account of the Olivet Discourse focuses solely on the nation of Israel and Tribulation events preceding the return of the Messiah, he passes over prophecies relating to the church. On the other hand, Luke, in the role of the first church historian, introduces the church aspect into his account as a parenthesis of the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21.

He begins with the phrase “*before all these things*,” that is, before the events of the future Tribulation (Luke 21:12). In this eight-verse parenthesis, the Lord prophetically outlined what will happen to His disciples during the early days of the church as well as what will happen to believers during the future Tribulation, for the disciples pre-figured the saved Jews and Gentiles in Israel during the Tribulation?

He began by warning them that the same Jewish leadership that rejected Him would persecute them as well (v. 12a) and that Gentile kings and rulers (v. 12b) would join with the Jewish persecutors. This would turn to their advantage, however, for doors of opportunity would open for them to give irrefutable testimony for the Lord (v. 13).

We know from Mark 13:10 that the Scriptures they would write would add to their verbal testimony, enabling the gospel of salvation to spread throughout the entire world. According to Luke’s account, they did not need to be anxious when brought before authorities, for God promised to give them wisdom and words that could not be resisted (v. 14-15). Regrettably, even family and friends would betray some of the disciples (v. 16a), and some would be martyred (v. 16b). But even in this, God promised that “*...there shall not a hair of your head perish or be lost*” (v. 18). This was a proverbial expression of their day, promising the Lord’s eternal preservation and assuring them that they will rule with Him as promised (v. 19). Luke recorded the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy to His disciples in his second historical book, the *Acts of the Apostles* and John recorded the future fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy to Tribulation saints in *Revelation*. Since Matthew’s purpose was to present Jesus of Nazareth as the King of Israel, he precludes the disciples’ role in the church and instead, uses them to represent primarily the godly Jewish people that will live during the Tribulation.<sup>1</sup>

## Factor 2: Presuppositions Help or Hinder Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse

Over the centuries people have interpreted the prophecies of the Olivet Discourse in numerous ways. These differences arise from the presuppositions that influence each individual’s understanding of the text. Our presuppositions either help or hinder our understanding of Christ’s words in His Discourse. Recognizing the importance of presuppositions, I will state mine before delving into the next portion of our study:

- As a futurist, I interpret all of Matthew 24, verses 4 through 51, as prophecies to be fulfilled AFTER the Rapture or catching up of believers at the end of the church age; therefore, the church is not mentioned in Matthew 24.

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<sup>1</sup> William Kelly, *Lectures on The Gospel of Matthew* (Sunbury, PA: Believers Bookshelf, 1971 (1868), 479.

- With the exception of Matthew 24:2 (the prophecy of the Temple's destruction that was fulfilled in AD 70), I believe that the doctrine of the "Immanency of the Rapture" precludes any fulfillment of other prophecies prior to the Rapture.
- I do recognize that "stage setting," or the preparatory arranging of circumstances and conditions; etc. that must be in place before the Tribulation begins will be observable prior to the Rapture. These include alignments of nations, the rebirth of Israel as a nation, etc.
- I believe the Olivet Discourse primarily is intended for the nation of Israel and believers during the Tribulation who will be Jewish and Gentile.
- I believe the Olivet Discourse is to be interpreted by reading it in its literal or normal sense as would have been understood in the historical setting of the time it was given and in consideration of the grammar of the text.
- Finally, I believe that any correct interpretation of the Olivet Discourse requires total harmonization with the parallel records of Mark and Luke and related Old Testament prophetic passages as well as passages from the book of *Revelation*. For simplicity, I primarily will focus on Matthew's account and bring other passages in as needed for clarification.