

Difficult Verses in the Olivet Discourse

1. Introduction

- A. Four problem passages for partial preterist interpretation to answer.
- B. The context and the time reference of “this generation” puts the fulfillment of these events in the first century.
- C. The four difficult passages all taken from Matthew’s gospel:
 - 1. Matthew 24:14
 - 2. Matthew 24:15, 21
 - 3. Matthew 24:29-31
 - 4. Matthew 24:34

2. Difficult Passage #1: The Gospel Preached in all the World

- A. How could gospel be preached in the whole world in the 1st century? There is scriptural evidence that it did reach the entire known world.
- B. Colossians 1:23 ... the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven ...
- C. Romans 1:8 ... spoken of throughout the whole world
- D. Romans 16:25-26 ... the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations ...
- E. “World” in Matthew in 24:14 was translated from the Greek word “*oikoumene*” (Strong’s 3625), that is defined as “the inhabited earth, that is the Roman world.”
- F. Jesus was not saying the gospel had to reach the ends of the whole earth, but to the ends of the known world, which at that time was the Roman empire.
- G. The Greek word “*kosmos*” (Strong’s 2889), is the term that applies to the entire earth.
- H. See Luke 2:1 “And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world (*oikoumene*) should be registered.” The decree is not for the whole earth, but for the Roman empire.

3. Difficult Passage #2: Worse Tribulation the World has ever seen or will see

- A. The “abomination of desolation” and the “great tribulation” will come resulting the worst times ever seen since the beginning of the world, or will ever see.
- B. Abomination of desolation occurred during the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Roman General Titus.
- C. The high priest standing in the holy place and continuing to offer sacrifices in the temple was an abomination and a rejection of Christ’s atoning work on the cross.
- D. Jesus followed the *law of leprosy* (Lev. 14:33-47) in cleansing the Jewish temple twice and declaring it to be torn down (Matt. 24:2; Lev. 14:44-45).
- E. Many Christians associate the term *tribulation* with the dispensational’s definition of it.
- F. The tribulation corresponds to the First Jewish Revolt in A.D. 66-73.
- G. The signs of wars, rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes can all be historically verified as occurring in the time leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem.
- H. An estimated 1.1 million died in the Siege of Jerusalem in AD70. Josephus’s account of the war reports very terrible and catastrophic events that in some ways, could be the worst events ever suffered. Does it have to be the worst?
- I. The dispensational view of the tribulation is connected to the final week of Daniel’s seventy weeks prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27). “Gap Theory” interpretation.
- J. Jesus may have been using “*hyperbolic language*,” which is a figure of speech that uses exaggeration, or overstates a truth, to emphasize a point or evoke strong feelings. In this case, it is used to express great suffering.

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- K. The idea of *the worst times up to that point in history, or will ever be after that*, has been expressed at least five different times in scripture.
- Exodus 11:6 The cry of grief at the death of the firstborn during the Exodus
 - Ezekiel 5:9 God executing judgment on Jerusalem in 593 BC
 - Joel 2:2 Same statement in Joel concerning a judgment in 720 BC
 - Daniel 12:1 Occurs at the time of the resurrection at the eschaton
 - Matthew 24:21 Applies to the destruction of Jerusalem
- L. Conclusion: Jesus used hyperbolic language in making this statement

4. Difficult Passage #3: Sun, moon, stars darkened, coming in the clouds

- A. The five points to be addressed in this passage are as follows:
1. Sun, moon, and stars darkened; powers of heaven shaken, coming in the clouds
 2. The “sign” of the Son of Man in heaven
 3. Tribes of the earth mourn
 4. Angels gather His elect
 5. The Greek words *Parousia* and *erchomai*
- B. **Point 1:** Jesus makes numerous references to Old Testament passages that speak of coming judgment in metaphorical language.
- C. Jesus’s use of the following phrases was understood by the Jewish hearers of coming judgment. No where in these passages does God physically appear.
- The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light (Isaiah 13:9-10; Joel 2:10; 3:15),
 - The powers of the heaven will be shaken (Isaiah 9:13; 34:4; Joel 3:16),
 - The Lord coming in the clouds (Isaiah 19:1; Daniel 7:13), and
 - The flashing of the lightning (Zechariah 9:14) were understood by the Jewish hearers of coming judgment.
- D. This is not the physical return of Jesus at the second coming at the end of the final age (eschaton), but His judgment coming. Jesus uses OT prophetic language.
- E. **Point 2:** “Parousia” used in Matthew 24 verses 3, 27, 37. & 39.
- F. The disciples’ question concerning the “sign of His coming, and of the end of the age,” uses the word Parousia (presence) even though Jesus was addressing the end of the Jewish age, not the end of time.
- G. In the Jewish mind, the destruction of the temple/Jerusalem would be the end of the world to them. Parousia was used in their question even though His answer was in reference to His judgment coming.
- H. “Parousia” in verse 27 has a connection to Daniel 7:13-14 where the Son of Man is enthroned in Heaven.
- I. The “sign” that appears in heaven mentioned in verse 30 is the reality that Jesus is seated in Heaven as King and was Israel’s promised Messiah. All the tribes of Israel will understand Christ’s enthronement and that judgment is coming.
- J. **Point 3:** The phrase “all the tribes of the earth will mourn” (Matthew 24:30b). should have possibly been translated “tribes of the land.” The land is Israel and the tribes being a reference to the 12 tribes of Israel.

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- K. The Greek word for “earth” (*ge*) is defined as earth, soil, land, inhabitants of a region. It probably should have been translated “tribes of the land,”
- L. It is not a reference to all the peoples of the earth. It is a local judgment on Israel that occurred in A.D. 70.
- M. **Point 4:** The Greek word “aggelos” (a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, an angel, a messenger from God) found in verse 31 was translated to English word “angel.” It could have been translated “messenger,” such as a minister or missionary.
- N. This would mean that God sends His ministers into all the world to preach the gospel in gathering (Ephesian 1:10) His elect from all over the world to be a part of His spiritual body, the church.
- O. **Point 5:** There are several Greek words that are translated into the English word “**coming**.”
 - “***erchomai***,” meaning “to come from one place to another, or to come into being.”
 - “***Parousia***,” means “presence, the coming, arrival, advent, and is the word most often associated with the future visible return from heaven of Jesus, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God.”
- P. It is important to note the word “*Parousia*” does not always refer to the second coming of Jesus. The word, in its essence, means “coming” “arrival” “presence” “advent.”
- Q. The verses most attributed to the second coming (Matthew 24:29-31) do not use the Greek word “*Parousia*,” but “*erchomai*.” Speaking metaphorically of the coming judgment upon Jerusalem for their rejection of the Messiah (Matt 23:37-39; Luke 19:44).
- R. “*Erchomai*” also used in Mark 14:62 when Jesus is appearing before Caiaphas which also mentions “with the clouds of heaven.”
- S. The verses speaking of the Days of Noah and Christ’s second coming (Matthew 24:36-41) use the Greek word “*Parousia*,” which is the word most often associated with Christ’s visible return.
- T. Verses 1-35 in Matthew 24 are signs concerning the destruction of the temple/Jerusalem in AD 70. Verses 36-51, and all of chapter 25 relate to Christ’s 2nd coming.

4. Difficult Passage #4: This Generation will not pass

- A. This verse serves as a *time statement* for all the events preceding it and should dictate the timing of these events.
- B. “*This generation*” refers to the generation to whom Jesus was speaking.
- C. Every time the phrase is used it refers to the generation alive at the time. It never refers to a distant future generation.
- D. The generation of Jesus’s day faced judgment (Matt. 11:16; 12:41-42, 45; 16:4; 23:36).
- E. The common biblical timeframe for a generation is 40 years (Num. 13; 32:13; Psa. 95:10)
- F. Many use Israel’s rebirth as a nation (May 14, 1948) as the start of this this generation. Predictions of a 1988 rapture never happened.
- G. Some use 70-80 years as a generation (Psa. 90:10) which puts you in the timeframe of 2018-2028 for the rapture/2nd coming. Again, time is running out for this view.
- H. Finally, some dispensationalists say “this generation” will be the one that will see all these events take place. Once the signs begin, they will take place rapidly marking the return of Christ. This gets around time running out for the 1948 starting date.
- I. The partial preterist position argues that the generation Jesus was speaking of was the current generation of His time.

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- J. The date of Jesus's crucifixion is generally dated between A.D. 30-33. If you add forty years to the time of the crucifixion, it brings you to the year A.D. 70, the date of the destruction of Jerusalem. This is the generation Jesus was talking about.
- K. The CONTEXT of the events that took place between Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His Olivet Discourse demands that Jesus was speaking to a 1st century generation.
- L. The signs/events Jesus gives stipulate ALL THESE THINGS (Matt. 24:4-28) taking place within "*this generation*."
- M. There are other portions of scripture where Jesus uses the same language of His coming in the clouds and it occurring during the lifetime, or generation of His hearers (Matthew 16:27-28; Mark 8:38-9:1).
- N. "Cosmic language" is used to describe the destruction of Jerusalem. This end of the age (eschaton) language is previewed in describing mini judgments in the Old Testament.

5. Biblical Harmonization (Jigsaw Puzzle Metaphor)

- A. Interpreting the four difficult verses from the partial preterist perspective requires us to incorporate biblical harmonization.
- B. Bible harmonization is the process of interpreting different biblical passages to show they do not contradict. Harmonization can involve creative interpretation to support a system of interpretation or eschatological model.
- C. It is interpreting scriptures so they do not conflict with the overall message of prophecy.
- D. Bible eschatology is like a complex jigsaw puzzle where various pieces must be put together to form a picture of end time Bible prophecy.
- E. If the pieces are properly put together, the picture that emerges is clear. If pieces are forced to fit into places where they do not belong, the picture will be distorted.
- F. All the pieces to the puzzle do not have to be in place, but we can get enough of the pieces in place to give us a clear picture of the message of scripture.

6. Final Comments:

- A. The book of Revelation is an expanded apocalyptic version of the Olivet Discourse.
- B. Only John's gospel did not include Jesus's Olivet Discourse, but he did write the book of Revelation which is his version of it.
- C. There are two aspects of Christ coming.
 - The first is Christ's "***judgment coming***" upon an apostate Israel due to their rejection of the Messiah. The judgment coming is communicated by the Greek word "***erchomai***." This occurred in A.D. 70 at the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.
 - Secondly, there is His "***physical coming***," on the "last day" to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God, which is most often associated by the Greek word "***Parousia***." This occurs at Christ's future second coming to the earth, but occurred in heaven at His enthronement at His ascension.
- D. The things written in Revelation were to shortly come to pass because the time was near (Revelation 1:1, 3).

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- E. Revelation concludes by saying He was coming quickly (Revelation 22:6, 10, 20).
- F. These *time statements* in the book of Revelation correspond to the first century *context* and the “*this generation*” timeframe of the Olivet Discourse.
- G. The information presented in this lesson begins the dismantling of the dispensational premillennial system of eschatology because its foundation rests upon the Olivet Discourse.

Olivet Discourse Timeline:

