

Jesus' Olivet Discourse

Matthew 24 & 25



A known East-West earthquake fault transects the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Tourists today often stand at the very spot overlooking the Temple Mount to the West and the Wilderness of Judea and the Dead Sea to the East. It is there that Jesus, the Lord, will stand in the not-too-distant future to trigger earth's last terrible earthquake and the dawning of the long-awaited golden age of peace on earth.

Zechariah 14:2 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.

Zechariah 14:3 Then the Lord will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle.

Zechariah 14:4 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.

The “battle against Jerusalem” is the Battle of Armageddon. It will be quickly resolved by the Lord. On the earth and ready to inaugurate the one thousand year kingdom of God on the earth the Lord has something to attend to. He must hold a judgment of believers versus nonbelievers. Only believers who survive the Great Tribulation and endure to the end will be able to enter in to the kingdom and begin to repopulate and replenish the earth.

As Matthew twenty-five closes Jesus describes that earthly judgment. It is to be distinguished from the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Judgment of the Great White Throne.

- The Judgment Seat of Christ, a time of review and reward for believers only, takes place after the Rapture (Romans 14:10; First Corinthians 3:11-15; Second Corinthians 5:9-10).
- The Judgment of the Great White Throne takes place in eternity, after the thousand year kingdom. The wicked dead will be judged and sentenced to the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

Matthew 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

Matthew 25:32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

Matthew 25:33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

As far as I can tell shepherds never herded sheep with goats. What we are to derive from this is that there will be two very distinct groups with two very different destinies.

Matthew 25:34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Matthew 25:35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;

Matthew 25:36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

Matthew 25:37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?

Matthew 25:38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?

Matthew 25:39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

There are three categories of people: sheep, goats, and Jesus' "brethren." His brethren refers to the Jews on earth during the Great Tribulation. It would seem that the sheep and the goats are Gentiles who will be evaluated based upon their service to the Jews. The word used for "nations" is *ethne* which can also be translated Gentiles.

It is a judgment on whole nations but looks at individuals within those nations.

Remember that from the mid-point of the Tribulation till its end the Jews are subject to heavy persecutions. To show them kindness and to provide aid will show faith working. It will be an evidence of salvation.

It will be difficult to aid the Jews. For one thing, in the middle of the Tribulation the antichrist demands everyone swear allegiance to him. If they don't they won't be able to conduct business. These Gentiles - the sheep - obviously do not take his mark because all who do are eternally lost.

It's therefore not their works that save them. It is their decision to trust Jesus. Works will not save anyone. Notice Jesus calls the sheep "the righteous." They will be right with God the way people are always made right with God - by having been justified by faith in Jesus.

But, as James points out, faith without works is dead. Their activities will reveal their faith.

Matthew 25:41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

Matthew 25:42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;

Matthew 25:43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

Matthew 25:44 "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'

Matthew 25:45 Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

Matthew 25:46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

One important detail is that "everlasting fire" was originally "prepared for the devil and his angels." It was not God's intention to 'send' men there. In fact it is accurate to say that God sends no one there but that they choose it as a destination when they refuse salvation through Jesus Christ.

God prepared the kingdom for the righteous "from the foundation of the world." It is His will that none perish!

Everlasting fire is a reference to the Lake of Fire or what we call Hell. It seems that though these nonbelieving Tribulation survivors are sentenced to Hell they are temporarily incarcerated in Hades. I say that because after the thousand years are up there is a final judgment of all the nonbelieving dead of all time. Their names are not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life - meaning they died having rejected the Lord's gracious offer to save them. Then they are thrown into Hell.

We know that the Great Tribulation lasts seven years and that it is split in half by the antichrist entering the Jewish Temple and desecrating it by demanding to be worshipped. The two three and one half year periods are also described as 1260 days (based on a 360 day calendar year).

In the Book of Daniel we're told that an additional thirty days will be tacked on at the end of the Great Tribulation before the kingdom begins:

Daniel 12:11 "And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.

Scholars speculate that it is during these thirty additional days that the judgment of the nations will occur, as well as other preparations for the kingdom to begin.

There are a lot of applications we can draw from the final judgment:

- Faith without works is always dead! Since you are saved, bear fruit of good works. Discover the good works the Lord has prepared for you.
- Hell is all too real. We can't compromise our message to accommodate other 'faiths' and belief systems because the stakes are too high.
- Israel is to be kept separate in our theology from the Church. God has a plan for the descendants of Abraham and we are not them.
- Finally (and perhaps most importantly) Jesus considers us one with Him. What affects us affects Him. Think of that when dealing with other believers!