

Chapter XI

THE OCCASION OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

The Lord's discourse to His disciples on the mount of Olives, a few days before His crucifixion, supplies us with a great deal of information about *latter day* events. This message, like so many prophetic portions of Scripture, contains information that is written together but may not be fulfilled together. It refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.; it warns of false christs that shall arise throughout the ages; it spans the centuries to the reestablishment of Israel as a nation in the parable of the fig tree; it speaks of wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines and pestilences as the *beginning of sorrows* (birth pangs) that shall ultimately produce the coming of the Lord; it speaks of false prophets who shall deceive many; it speaks of the love of many waxing cold because *the iniquity* will abound and produce the apostasy that shall arise in the final stages of the church age; it speaks of the revelation of the antichrist and of the great tribulation period; it speaks of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom upon this earth; and it speaks of much, much more.

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It is our purpose to devote this chapter to the circumstances and events that led our Lord to deliver the prophecies that are contained in *the Olivet Discourse*. It will be the purpose of our next chapter to deal with the Discourse itself.

Therefore let us go back in time and remember that our Lord and His disciples came to Bethany on the ninth day of the month of Abib, five days before He was crucified (Mark 10:46-11:1; John 12:1). Abib is March or April in the Jewish lunar calendar. It was late in the afternoon when they reached Bethany because they had traveled about fifteen miles from Ephraim to Jericho early that morning (John 11:54). Jesus had healed one blind man as He was going into the city and two blind men as He was coming out of the city, and He and His disciples had also traveled the twenty miles from Jericho to Bethany (Matthew 20:30; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35).

In Bethany they came to the house of Simon the leper, *There they made him a supper* (John 12:2). Martha served and Lazarus was one of the guests. Mary came, *as He sat at meat*, to anoint our Lord with a very costly ointment (Matthew 26:7; John 12:2-3). This sent Judas into a hypocritical tirade about the poor, questioning why this expensive ointment had not been sold and the money given to the poor. *This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this* (John 12:6-7).

This statement anticipated the events that were to follow. The anointing was not an accident of fate, nor was the night upon which Mary anointed our Lord a matter of chance. Mary acted out of love and adoration for our Lord, but her action was undoubtedly prompted by the Holy Spirit. The anointing was prophetic. It was the tenth of the month, and the anointing

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declared that our Lord would be sacrificed as the Passover Lamb four days hence on the fourteenth day of the month (Exodus 12:3-6).

On the next day (still the tenth of the month: because the day follows the night in the Jewish reckoning of time [Genesis 1:5]) our Lord entered the city of Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of an ass, while the people *cut down branches off of the trees and strawed them in the way* (Mark 11:8) and shouted praises unto the Lord (John 12:12-16). This fulfilled the prophecy, *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass* (Zechariah 9:9). This prophecy, coupled with Exodus chapter twelve, proclaimed that our Lord presented Himself to the nation of Israel on that day as the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12:1-6). It also established the truth that John the Baptist had declared three years earlier, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world* (John 1:29).

This truth was magnified many times over in the days following our Lord's entry into Jerusalem. The things that He did and the things that were done to Him fulfilled the selection, examination, and slaying of the Passover Lamb. These events showed our Lord to be the object of faith of those who offered their sacrifices by faith, of every Scriptural sacrifice from the garden of Eden to the cross of Calvary. The animal sacrifices themselves could never take away sin, but faith in the One Who was represented in the sacrifices could (Hebrews 10:1-18).

The Lord had instructed Moses before the first Passover in Egypt: *Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: and ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole congregation of Israel*

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shall kill it in the evening (Exodus 12:1-6). They were to catch the blood of the lamb in a basin, and they were to *strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door posts of the houses, wherein they shall eat it* (Exodus 12:7). They were to roast the lamb with fire and eat it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (Exodus 12:8),

Nevertheless, at various times throughout her history, Israel had neglected to observe the feast of Passover despite the fact that God had told Moses the Passover was to be observed for ever (Exodus 12:24; II Chronicles 30:1-5). The Jews had also altered the observance of the law and the sacrificial system by a series of interpretations that had been placed upon them by *the tradition of men* (Mark 7:6-13). It is difficult to say, then, with any degree of accuracy, how the feast of Passover was being observed at the time of our Lord's crucifixion.

No matter how the nation of Israel was then observing the feast, our Lord fulfilled every detail of the feast. He presented Himself for sacrifice on the tenth day of the month of Abib. He was examined on subsequent days by the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees (Matthew 22:15-46), the chief priests, the Sanhedrin, by Herod and finally by Pilate, who announced, *I find in him no fault at all* (John 18:38). On the preparation day of the Passover He was hanged on the cross at the time of the morning sacrifice (Mark 15:25), and He bowed His head and dismissed His Spirit at the time of the evening sacrifice (Matthew 27:46; John 19:30). This corresponded with the instructions God had given to Moses concerning the killing of the Passover lamb, it was to be slain in the evening (Exodus 12:6). After that our Lord's body was taken down from the cross and prepared for burial. It was then placed in the tomb before the Passover Sabbath began (John 19:31). Then, in accordance with *the sign of the prophet Jonah*, our Lord rose from the dead after

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three days and three nights, at the beginning of the feast of Firstfruits (Matthew 12:38-40; Leviticus 23:9-11).

On the eleventh day of the month, our Lord and His disciples came to a fig tree as they traveled from Bethany to Jerusalem. Jesus cursed the tree when He discovered that it bare no fruit, saying, *Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever* (Matthew 21:19). This act might seem strange to us, but by this act our Lord provided His disciples with an important object lesson. The fig tree was an allegorical portrayal of the nation of Israel. It showed all the signs that it should have had fruit on it, but it had none. Thus the cursing of the fig tree was prophetic of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Matthew 21:19-20), when the *mountain* (Israel) of our Lord's parable would be *cast into the sea* (the Gentile nations of the world) in answer to the prayers of the saints (Matthew 21:21-22). This was borne out by the fact that the tree withered so quickly, and by the fact that in a few days our Lord would say to the religious leaders in Israel, *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate* (Matthew 23:38).

On the following day, as our Lord and His disciples were once again on their way into Jerusalem, they came to the same tree:

And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? (Matthew 21:20-23)

He answered them with a series of parables which revealed the sad spiritual condition of the nation of Israel (Matthew 21:28-22:14). Then the Pharisees and their enemies, the Herodians,

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joined forces to try to trap the Lord with their question: *Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not* (Matthew 22:17)? He defeated their subtlety with a question about whose image was upon a Roman coin. They answered, *Caesar's*. Then our Lord said, *Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's* (Matthew 22:21). This left them silent before our Lord because they could not deal with such wisdom.

The same day the Sadducees related a story to our Lord about a Jewish woman who had married seven brothers, according to Jewish law. The first had died, and she had married the second. This process continued until she had married them all. Then they asked, *Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her* (Matthew 22:28). He told them, *Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven* (Matthew 22:29-30). Then He defeated their subtlety by asking them, *... have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living* (Matthew 22:32).

But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:34-46)

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It was then that our Lord brought a scathing denunciation upon the nation of Israel as a whole, and upon the scribes and the Pharisees in particular. This denunciation is found in the twenty-third chapter of the book of Matthew. It reveals that they justified themselves in the things that they did by the *commandments and doctrines of men*, but our Lord said:

Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Matthew 23:28-39)

As they departed the temple, Jesus told His disciples, *See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down* (Matthew 24:2). This was an amazing statement in the light of the construction of Herod's temple.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who was alive at the time of the fulfillment of this prophecy, wrote in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, *Now the temple was built of stones that were white and strong, and each of their length twenty-five cubits, their height was eight, and their breadth about twelve. . . .* (*The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, Translated by, William Whiston, A.M., The John C. Winston Company,

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Philadelphia, Toronto, 1957, pg. 472, Bk 15, Par. 3) Given the size of the individual white marble stones used in the construction of the temple (approximately 40 feet by 12.5 feet by 19 feet each), it is no wonder the disciples could not immediately question our Lord about the events and circumstances that could produce the destruction of such an edifice.

At the time of our Lord's statement, the temple had been under renovation and reconstruction for about forty-nine years. The renovation would not be completed for another thirty-four years. It was a magnificent edifice and was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. So the concept that one stone would not be left standing upon another overwhelmed the disciples of our Lord. Consequently there is no recorded conversation until they reached the mount of Olives. *And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?* (Matthew 24:3). These questions, like Mary's anointing of our Lord, must also have been wrought by the Holy Spirit of God for they refer to things that the disciples did not yet understand (compare: Acts 1:6).

According to the on-line encyclopedia Wikipedia, *Herod's Temple in Jerusalem was a massive expansion of the Second Temple along with renovations of the entire Temple Mount. Herod the Great's expansion project began around 19 B.C. The renovation by Herod began with the building of giant underground vaults upon which the temple would be built so that it could be larger than the small flat area on the top of Mount Moriah. Ground level at the time was at least 20 ft. (6m) below the current level, as can be seen by walking the Western Wall tunnels. The edge of this platform remains everywhere; part of it forms the Western Wall.*

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This information from Wikipedia is important to me because it confirms information I have retained in my memory, but have long since forgotten some of the sources. Wikipedia is an electronic encyclopedia and is not generally accepted by the academic world because it is not in printed form. Nevertheless the information has been derived from academically acceptable sources and was a convenient source of help to me.

In this regard the purpose of this work on the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is not to convince the academic world of its veracity. That is an impossible task, no matter the documentation. The purpose of this book is to strengthen believers in the faith. The scholarship of this world cannot do that because *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned* (I Corinthians 2:14). Consequently the believer's growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is dependent upon the Word of God and the work of the Spirit of God. As a preacher and teacher of the Word of God, I understand perfectly that I can *plant* and I can *water*, but only *God can give the increase* (I Corinthians 3:6).

It is an historical fact that not one stone of Herod's Temple has been left standing upon another. Some have mistakenly thought that the Western Wall was a part of the temple, but it was not. All that remains of the temple in Jerusalem is a massive foundation of stones that were back-filled and overlaid with native stones, some of which were as much as *44.6 feet by 11 feet and weighing 628 tons, while most were in the range of 2.5 by 3.5 by 15 feet.* (Wikipedia, Herod's Temple) These stones did not form any part of the temple. These stones merely expanded the area suitable for building Herod's Temple upon Mount Moriah. *As for the temple itself, it was made, not of*

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local stone, as was the rest of the complex, but imported white marble, which was in sharp contrast to the entire city and gleamed in the daylight. (Wikipedia, Herod's Temple)

To gain a concept of the Western Wall and the other remains of this building platform, picture a modern construction site for a large building complex. Long before construction of the buildings begin, earth-moving equipment and compactors are brought to the site to prepare the ground for construction. Depending upon the topography, it is sometimes necessary to erect retaining walls. Trucks deliver tons and tons of rock which is compacted to provide a building platform for the buildings as well as the surrounding area. Once the ground has been prepared for the building, then excavation for the foundation begins and concrete is poured. After that the building is erected. Now move back in time before this type of construction was possible and you will recognize that what remains in Jerusalem were not the stones of the temple, but the stones that prepared the top of Mount Moriah for the building of the temple.

In our next chapter, *The Olivet Discourse*, we shall provide our Lord's answers to the three questions of the disciples, and we will provide an explanation of the parables of the *ten virgins*, *a man traveling into a far country*, and *a shepherd dividing his sheep from the goats*.