

The Olivet Discourse

I. The Context of the Olivet Discourse

A. Cultural

1. The disciple's expectations regarding the Kingdom were at a fever pitch.

Luke 19:11 ff.
Matthew 24:1-3

2. The Jewish nation fully expected the Kingdom to be established soon.

3. The Apocryphal literature of that time reveals a great expectation of deliverance from foreign oppression.

B. Historical

1. It is day three of the last week of Christ's life.

Day 1 - Triumphal entry and cleansing of the temple (Monday)

Day 2 - Teaching in the temple (Tuesday)

Day 3 - Last visit to the temple, Olivet Discourse (Wednesday)

Day 4 - Last Supper in the evening (Thursday)

Day 5 - Trial and Crucifixion (Friday)

Day 6 - In the tomb (Saturday)

Day 7 - Resurrection (Sunday)

2. The temple, under construction for over 40 years, is one of the wonders of that time.

C. The Audience

1. We are told that it is to four of the disciples, Peter, John, James, and Andrew.

Mark 13:3

2. More broadly, it is to the Jewish people as a whole.

- a. The entire context is Jewish.

- b. It is in answer to the disciples questions of when the Jewish Kingdom will be established by the Messiah.

- c. It relates events that occur during the Tribulation.

- d. The events are followed immediately by the Judgment of the Living Nations which occurs immediately prior to the Millennium.

D. The Time

1. There are two basic views
 - a. It refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as inferred from Luke 21:22-24. This is the classical Amillennial view.
 - b. It refers to events which occur at the end of the Church Age. This is the Premillennial view.
2. The case for the Amillennial view.
 - a. Luke 21:22-24.
 - b. Historical interpretation of the discourse.
 - c. Similarity of events described in the discourse with the events of A.D. 70.
 - d. Covenantal interpretation of Scripture.
3. The case for the Premillennial view.
 - a. Many of the events described did not occur in A.D. 70. For example, the signs in the heavens, the establishment of the Kingdom, and the Judgment of the Nations.
 - b. Jesus is answering the disciples question regarding the establishment of the Kingdom, not regarding the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - c. The events describe are the same events as those which will occur during the Tribulation.
 - d. This interpretation best fits the context of the events described in the discourse.

E. Three Keys Necessary for Proper Interpretation

1. The audience is Jewish.
2. The prophetic context is Pre-Kingdom, not Pre-Rapture.
3. The Discourse is given to answer the disciple's question regarding the time the Kingdom would be established.

II. The Prediction - Matthew 24:1-2

- A. The disciples were showing Christ the beauty of the temple.
- B. Christ predicted the utter destruction of the temple. He stated that one stone would not be left on another.

1. This fit the Jewish idea that the first thing the Messiah would do would be to destroy and rebuild the temple.
2. Christ's prediction, however, is one of judgment. (Matthew 23:36-39)

III. The Question - Matthew 24:3

- A. The disciple's expected the immediate establishment of the Kingdom.
- B. They asked Christ what the specific sign would be that indicated the Kingdom was about to begin.
- C. Note the twofold aspect of this question.
 1. The sign of your coming.
 2. The sign of the end of the age.
- D. A proper understanding of the disciple's question is key to interpreting Christ's answer.

III. The Answer - Matthew 24:4-25:46

- A. Presigns
 1. Christ begins his answer with the presigns. These are signs that precede "the sign" of his coming mentioned in Matthew 24:29-31.
 2. Ten presigns are given. Note the following:
 - a. These signs were not historically fulfilled.
 - b. The conclusion, then, is that the fulfillment of these signs is yet future.
 3. The Presigns given.
 - a. Presign #1 - Deception of False Christs - Matthew 24:4-5
 - 1). There have always been false christs. However, just prior to the establishment of the Kingdom, false christs will proliferate.

2 Timothy 4:3-4
1 Timothy 4:1-3
 - 2). False Christs are of two different types.
 - a). Someone who claims to be "the Christ."
 - b). Someone who claims to be "the deliverer."
 - 3). The ultimate deceiver is the Antichrist.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
1 John 2:18-20

- b. Presign #2 - The Signs of Conflict - Matthew 24:6-8
- 1). There have always been wars, but just prior to the second coming, wars will become more and more frequent.
 - 2). Famines
 - a). Ethiopia
 - b). India
 - 3). Earthquakes
 - a). China
 - b). United States
 - 4). Pestilences
 - a). AIDS
 - b). Disease
 - 5). All of these are only the beginning of sorrows just as labor pains start slow and increase in frequency until birth.
- c. Presign #3 - Persecution Promised - Matthew 24:9-10
- 1). This persecution is not against Christians, it is against Jews.
Revelation 12:1-17
 - 2). Although the Jew is the specific target of Antichrist's wrath, Christians will suffer as well.
 - 3). The persecution will be so great that people will betray one another for survival. Note the parallels to the Holocaust.
 - 4). As a footnote, we find that the inclusion/exclusion of the Gentiles from the Kingdom will be based on their treatment of the Jew during this time. Matthew 25:34ff.
- d. Presign #4 - False Prophets - Matthew 24:11
1. There have always been false prophets, but just prior to Christ's return, false prophets will abound.
 2. Paul warns about coming deceivers.
2 Timothy 3:1 ff.
1 Timothy 4:1 ff.

3. Peter warns us about false prophets.
2 Peter 2:1 ff.
 4. John warns us of false prophets.
1 John 4:1-3
1 John 2:18
 5. In our modern day, false doctrine abounds.
 - i. New Age
 - ii. Prosperity gospel (see 2 Peter 2:1 ff.)
 - iii. Universalism
- e. Presign #5 - Lawlessness - Matthew 24:12
1. This word literally means “without law” – *anomia*. It is used to speak of those who rebel against all authority.
 2. The Antichrist is called “the man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.
 3. Lawlessness is closely related to disobedience. Note the following passages.

Romans 1:30
2 Timothy 3:2
2 Peter 2:10 ff.
- f. Presign #6 - The Reward of Perseverance - Matthew 24:13
1. Perseverance implies severe persecution. The times immediately prior to Christ’s second coming will be times of intense persecution for both Jew and believer alike.
 2. The persecution will be so severe that 2/3 of Israel will be destroyed.

Zechariah 13:8.
 3. Note that perseverance is a mark of true believers.

Hebrews 3:6, 14
Hebrews 4:11
Hebrews 6:12
Hebrews 11:35
 4. On the other hand, apostasy is a mark of unbelievers.

1 John 2:19
Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23

- g. Presign #7 - Gospel Preached to All Nations - Matthew 24:14
- 1). Note that the word translated “gospel” literally means “good news.” It was used to refer to an official imperial proclamation from the emperor.
 - 2). Christians often use the word “gospel” to refer to the message of salvation (Romans 1:16), however, that is not its only meaning.
 - 3). In Mark 1:14-15 and Matthew 4:17 we see that the “gospel of the kingdom” is the proclamation that God's righteous rule is to begin. The Jews rejected the Messiah at the first proclamation, however, they will not reject him on the second.
 - 4). This gospel is also seen in Revelation 14:6-7.
 - 5). Thus, this gospel is not the message of salvation, but the message that God's righteous reign is about to begin. It *includes* the message of salvation, but it is not *only* the message of salvation.
- h. Presign # 8 - The Abomination of Desolation - Matthew 24:15-20
- 1). The abomination of desolation refers to the desecration of the temple by Antichrist.
 - 2). Daniel prophesied this in Daniel 9:27.
 - 3). Paul pictures this in 2 Thessalonians 2:4.
 - 4). This refers to the event that marks the midpoint of the tribulation when the Antichrist desecrates the temple, breaks his treaty with Israel, and sets himself up as God to be worshiped.
 - 5). Immediately after this event, Christ warns those alive at the time to flee into the wilderness where they will be protected for 3 1/2 years. (Revelation 12:13-17)
 - 6). The last half of the tribulation, also known as the “great tribulation”, is a time of God's judgment on men as well as Satan's last attempt at world dominion. Matthew 24:21 is used to give this period its name.
 - 7). Note that this event also marks the time that Satan is cast out of heaven. (compare this passage with Revelation 12:13-17.)
- i. Presign # 9 - Severe Persecution Promised - Matthew 24:21-22
- 1). For the third time in this discourse, Christ gives warning regarding the tremendous persecution that will come at this time. (Matthew 24:9-10, 13, 21-22)

- 2). The last half of the tribulation will be a time of intense persecution to the Jewish nation and believers because Satan knows he only has a short time. (Revelation 12:13-17)
 - 3). In fact, Christ says that if those days were not shortened by His return, no flesh would still be alive. However, because of his people, he will shorten those days. Compare his protection in 2 Peter 2:4-9 and also the story of Lot in Genesis 18:20-32.
 - 4). God will protect his own children even if he has to rearrange the universe to do so.
- j. Presign # 10 - False Christ Will Abound - Matthew 24:23-28
- 1). For the third time Christ predicts false Christs and false prophets will come. (Matthew 24:4-6, 11, 23-28)
 - 2). Because of the intense persecution, and the fact that those Jews alive will be looking for the Messiah, we have two possibilities here.
 - a). False christs will rise thinking they will bring deliverance.
 - b). Satan will raise up false christs to lure the Jews out of hiding to be destroyed.
 - 3). Probably the latter is intended. It best fits the context of the preceding verses as well as the passage itself.
 - 4). Christ's return will be something that will not be missed. It will be brilliant enough to be seen by the whole world. See Revelation 19.

B. The Sign - Matthew 24:29-31

1. The Setting - Matthew 24:29

- a. This takes place "immediately after the tribulation." The seven final years of God's dealing with Israel are over. It is now time for the unveiling of the King.
- b. Just so no one will miss the return of the real Christ to earth, God turns out the lights of the heavens. The sun, moon, and stars are all darkened for this event.
- c. The parallel passage in Luke 21:25-26 sheds additional light on this verse. See also the following Old Testament references to these events.

Isaiah 13:6-16

Isaiah 34:1-4

Joel 2

Haggai 2:6-7

- d. These signs compare well with the judgments of the tribulation as found in Revelation.

Sixth Seal - Revelation 6:12-17
Fourth Trumpet - Revelation 8:12-13
Fifth Bowl - Revelation 16:10-11
Seventh Bowl - Revelation 16:17-21

- e. We could liken these events as God dimming the theatre lights so that all attention can be focused on the lighted stage.

2. The Sign Appears - Matthew 24:30

- a. What the Sign is not.

- 1). It is not a blazing cross as pictured by Origen and other Church fathers. There is absolutely no Scriptural support for this.
- 2). It is not the *Shekinah* glory of God alone.

- b. What the Sign is.

- 1). It is Christ Himself in his unveiled glory.
 - a). The Greek sentence structure points to the identification of the Sign as Christ.
 - b). It could be translated "the sign *which is* the Son of Man."
- 2). We see Christ in his unveiled glory arriving at the Battle of Armageddon in Revelation 19.
- 3). The term "revelation" is derived from the Greek term *apokalupis*. This term literally means "to reveal or unveil." Christ's glory is unveiled at his Second Coming.

3. The Sequel - Matthew 24:31

- a. The time of God's grace is over. It is time for judgment.
- b. The angels, God's instruments of judgment, are sent to gather his elect. Those that have already believed on the Messiah will be gathered for entrance into the Kingdom.
- c. This idea is picked up again in Matthew 25:31. Matthew 24:32 to Matthew 25:30 is a parenthetical passage in which Christ stresses the imminency of his return.
- d. We see the angels as God's executors of judgment in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.
- e. Note as an aside that the trumpet was a common instrument used to call an assembly of people together.

C. Warnings Regarding the Immediacy of Events - Matthew 24:32-25:30

- Some background comments are in order at this point.

It is assumed by many that the time of Christ's second coming can be precisely known by adding seven years to the signing of the treaty between Israel and the Antichrist. This is not necessarily true for the following reasons:

- Christ continuously stressed this fact to his disciples, and hence to us, that no one knew the time of his coming. We call this the doctrine of the Immanency. Christ only tells us that we can know the general season, but never the specific time (Matthew 24:36).
- Note that Christ says in verse 29 "immediately *after* the tribulation of those days." He stresses the fact that his return is *after* the tribulation, which places His return some time after the seven years of the tribulation.
- The illustrations in Matthew 24:32 - 25:30 are irrelevant if we could pinpoint the exact time of His return. Why warn people of His unexpected return if they could just add seven years to the signing of the peace treaty which starts the tribulation in the first place.
- Daniel, in Daniel 12: 11-13, gives us the number of days between the abomination of desolation and the establishment of the Kingdom. Two periods of time are given. The first is 1290 days which is 30 days greater than 1260 or 3-1/2 years. The second is 1335 days, or 75 days greater than 1260 days. This can look confusing at first, but is easily understood if we see that the first figure of 1290 days is to the establishment of the Kingdom. This gives us 30 days to "mop up" between the time the tribulation ends and the Kingdom begins. The second can be seen as the time required for all of the judgments to be completed, an additional 75 days. Thus we see that there is a little "slush time" between the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the Millennium.
- The doctrine of the Immanency always refers to the second coming, never to the rapture. We believe in the immanency of the rapture only as a by-product of the immanency of the second coming. Basically put, if we don't know the date of the end of the tribulation, and we don't know the exact length of time between the end of the tribulation and the start of the Millennium, then there is no way we can know the start of the tribulation.

1. The Parable of the Fig Tree - Matthew 24:32-35

- a. This parable is one of the most misunderstood parables found in the New Testament. Interpretations have been:
 1. The fig tree is Israel and the generation is 40 years. The budding of the fig tree was the establishment of the Jewish state in A.D. 1948. This view has been popularized by Hal Lindsey in the *Late Great Planet Earth*.

2. The fig tree is Israel and the generation is the disciples. This view is maintained by Amillennialists who interpret the Olivet Discourse as referring to the destruction of Israel by Rome in A.D. 70.
 3. The fig tree is Israel and the generation is those alive when the signs begin. That generation will not die until all of the prophecies regarding the Kingdom have been fulfilled.
- b. Before interpreting this parable, we need to look at its general context within the Olivet Discourse. Specifically:
1. This is the first of six examples which Christ gives to show the immediacy of his return at the time of the end. It cannot, therefore, refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
 2. Christ is trying to emphasize the imminency of his return and the fact that those who are alive at that time need to be prepared.
- c. Secondly, we need to look at the following general guidelines for interpreting scripture.
1. Do not force esoteric or wild interpretations on scripture. For the most part, those who heard a particular message understood its meaning.
 2. Examine the context very carefully. No interpretation will run counter to the context of the passage in which it is found.
 3. Do not force symbols to have universal meaning unless there is evidence in support of doing so. In other words, do not force the fig tree to be Israel just because Israel is seen as a fig tree in other passages in the Bible.
 4. Usually, the clearest and simplest interpretation is the correct one.
- d. The interpretation.
1. The fig tree does not refer to Israel, but is used as a symbol to show the immediacy of Christ's return. There is no evidence in this passage that Israel is the fig tree.
 2. The "generation" is the generation that is alive when the presigns begin. This is seen by examining the context of the passage.
 3. The "budding" of the fig tree is the start of the presigns. Those who see the start of the events, i.e. the budding of the fig tree, will be alive when the figs are brought forth, i.e. the Kingdom begins.
 4. The "these things" is those things Christ has been talking about, i.e. the presigns given in the first part of the Chapter.

- e. The meaning.
 - 1. From this interpretation, we see that the meaning of this parable is that those who are alive when the signs begin are alive when the Kingdom begins. The process of establishing the Kingdom will not be drawn out over a long period of time.
 - 2. Men must be ready when the signs start, so they will be ready when the Kingdom begins.

2. The Days of Noah - Matthew 24:36-41

- a. This is the second of six illustrations Christ gives to describe the imminency of his return.
- b. Christ begins this example by stating that the exact time of His return is only known to the Father. Most people have trouble with this because of one of the following assumed positions:
 - 1. Christ did not know the time of his own return. He must therefore not be omniscient and therefore not be God.
 - 2. Christ knew but did not tell anyone.
 - 3. Christ purposely misled his disciples.

Actually, none of the above are satisfactory. What we need to understand is that Christ in his *humiliation* limited his omniscience to those things revealed to him by the Father. It is not that he *did not* know, but that he *chose* not to know.

- c. The interpretation.

Many say that the days of Noah refer to the wickedness of men at that time. Although it is true that Noah's days were one of widespread wickedness, the context of this passage does not seem to emphasize that. In fact, it seems to emphasize the normal, everyday events of life.

Therefore, this illustration does not show the moral character of the days of Christ's return, but the suddenness of his return. The men alive at the time of Noah who had no contact with him were suddenly swept away in judgment. Their business-as-usual lifestyle was divinely interrupted.

- d. The meaning.

Although the time immediately prior to Christ's return is a time of awful judgment, there will be those who do not see the spiritual significance of the events. Christ's coming will catch them totally unprepared just as the rains of Noah's day caught that generation unprepared.

e. The judgment.

Verses 40-41 have been interpreted in many different ways. Many say that this refers to the rapture where believers are caught away leaving the unbelievers for judgment. However, this runs counter to the entire context of this passage. We are not looking at pre-rapture events, but pre-revelation events.

What does seem to be in view here is that those taken are taken to judgment. In verse 39 we read that the flood *took away* the ungodly. It is most natural, then, to interpret verses 40-41 in the same way. Those taken are taken for judgment, those left are left to enter the Kingdom.

3. The Thief - Matthew 24:43-44

- a. This is the third of six illustrations showing the immediacy of Christ's return. This particular illustration is given to show the unexpectedness of His return.
- b. In those days, all of a person's wealth was stored in their home. There were no banks for the common people. Therefore, it was not uncommon for a thief to break into a home and steal the family treasures.
- c. Christ uses this illustration to show that when He returns, men will not be ready. What seems to be in view here is that men may have a general idea that He could come, but do not prepare for it. I may have a general idea that a thief may break into my house, but I really do not prepare for it as I would if I knew the exact time.
- d. The moral of this illustration is that men need to be ready at all times, so that when Christ does come, they will be prepared.

4. The Faithful and Unfaithful Servant - Matthew 24:45-51

- a. This is another illustration showing the unexpectedness of Christ's return. Whereas the previous illustration of the thief described an event that is probable, but unlikely, this illustration describes an event that is certain. The servant knows that his lord is returning, a man does not know that his house will be broken into.
- b. Christ is illustrating opportunity. This fits in well with the judgment of the nations found in chapter 25 in which inclusion or exclusion from the Kingdom is based on one's treatment of Israel.
- c. That servant that took advantage of his opportunity for service and fulfilled it faithfully will be rewarded upon his lord's return. On the other hand, if that same opportunity is wasted, only judgment will be given at the time of reckoning.
- d. Again, Christ's emphasis is on immanency. No one knows the exact day and hour of his return. When he does come, however, it will be forever too late to avert judgment if unready.

5. The Parable of the Ten Virgins - Matthew 25:1-13
- a. As in all of the other parables given by our Lord to the disciples, this one is really not that hard to understand.
 - b. This parable, like the parable of the Fig Tree, has been greatly misunderstood. Many identify the bridegroom as Christ and the ten virgins representative of the Church. When Christ comes to take us to heaven, there will be some wise who are ready for his coming, and some unprepared. Those that are wise have the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the oil, and hence are true believers. The others appear to have the Spirit, but in reality do not.
 - c. Before interpreting this parable in its context, some notes about Jewish weddings are in order. Basically, the events of a Jewish wedding in those days were:
 1. The parents of the bride and bridegroom would make a contract giving their children to each other in marriage. This occurred some time before the wedding and in fact may have occurred while the children were still babies.
 2. At a predetermined time, the couple were engaged. At this point they were considered to be legally married. Any act of unfaithfulness on the part of one of the members was considered adultery, and punishable by death. Note the example of Mary and Joseph.
 3. In the year or so after the betrothal, the bridegroom would prepare a house for his bride. Usually this was merely an extension to his father's house.
 4. Towards the end of the year after the betrothal, the bride would prepare for the bridegroom's coming. She did not know exactly when this would be.
 5. When all things were ready, the bridegroom would gather his friends and proceed to the house of the bride with much celebration. He would take his bride and parade back through the city to the house he had prepared for her.
 6. When he reached his house, all of the bridal party would enter and celebrate for a period of time, sometimes up to several days. At the end of that time, the best man would take the hand of the bride and place it into the hand of the bridegroom and all would leave, hopefully. The couple was now together and the marriage would be consummated.
 - d. With the order of events in mind, we are now ready to interpret this parable. In doing so, we will interpret the major points and then support our interpretation.

1. The bridegroom is Christ.
 - a. Throughout the Bible Christ is referred to as the bridegroom. (Eph 5:22ff, John 3:29, Matt 9:15)
 - b. The context of the passage is about Christ's return.
 - c. The statement in verse 13 relates Christ to the bridegroom.
2. The virgins are the tribulation survivors.
 - a. The virgins cannot be the Church because we are in heaven during the tribulation (Rev 19).
 - b. We are seen as returning with Christ at his coming in Revelation 19.
 - c. The Church is known as the bride of Christ (Eph 5:22ff, 2 Cor 11:2, Rev 21:2, 21:9, 22:17).
3. The wise virgins are those prepared for Christ's return.
 - a. This is determined from the context of the whole passage.
 - b. It is the prepared virgins that are allowed to enter the marriage feast.
4. The unwise virgins are those who are not prepared for Christ's return.
 - a. They do not have sufficient oil (Holy Spirit).
 - b. They are locked out of the marriage feast.
5. The marriage feast is the Millennial Kingdom.
 - a. The unprepared at Christ's coming are excluded from the Kingdom. Those that are prepared are allowed to enter.
 - b. In the Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15ff), the Kingdom is likened to a great feast.
 - c. In the Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (Matthew 22:1ff), the Kingdom is likened to a great feast.
 - d. It's the only interpretation that makes sense in the context.
- e. Application of the parable.
 1. It is again emphasized by Christ in verse 13 that no one knows the day or hour of his coming. Men must be ready at all times, so they will be ready at the right time.

2. There will be men at the end of the tribulation that will outwardly appear to be ready, but when Christ finally arrives, it will be seen that they were not ready at all.
6. The Parable of the Talents - Matthew 25:14-30
- a. This parable is similar to the Parable of the Minas (Pounds) in Luke 19:11-27. However it is not the same for the following reasons:

Parable of the Talents	Parable of the Pounds
The first two servants each made a profit of 100%.	The first servant made a profit of 1000%, the second 500%.
The third servant put the talent in the ground	The third servant put the talent in a napkin.
The specific reward is not mentioned. The first two servants were told to "enter into the joy of the Lord."	The reward for faithful service was rulership over cities.
The third servant loses his talent of money and his life.	The third servant loses his pound but no mention is made of further penalty.

- b. This illustration, like the other five, is meant to emphasize Christ's coming as being unexpected.
- c. The interpretation of this parable is as follows:
- 1). The man is Christ.
 - a). This fits the overall context of the parable.
 - b). It is Christ, who at his second coming, rewards the faithful survivors of the tribulation.
 - c). It is Christ who bestows divine opportunity for service, and it is He who holds men accountable for exercising that service to the best of their ability.
 - 2). The first two servants represent those who take advantage of opportunities for service during the tribulation.
 - a). They are permitted to enter the Kingdom.
 - b). Their specific service is seen in Matthew 25:34-40.
 - 3). The third servant represents those who do not take advantage of their opportunities.

- a). Those who do not take advantage of their opportunities during the tribulation will be denied entrance into the Kingdom (Matthew 25:41-46).
 - b). Note that this servant is cast into outer darkness. This is an expression of hell found in Matthew. (See Matthew 8:12 and 22:13) Also “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is used to refer to the torment of hell. (See Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30, and Luke 13:28).
- 4). Talents refer to opportunities for service.
- a). This matches what is being taught in the Parable of the Pounds in Luke 19:11ff. The difference is that the Parable of the Pounds refers to believers during the Church age, the Parable of the Talents refer to men during the tribulation.
 - b). This fits the context of the parable and the chapter.
- d. Application of the parable.
- 1). Men will be responsible for their divine opportunities for service during the tribulation, which will be an indicator of their salvation.
 - 2). Men who take advantage of these opportunities as mentioned in Matthew 25:34-40, will be invited into the Kingdom. Those who do not are denied entrance (Matthew 25:41-46).
- D. The Judgment of the Nations - Matthew 25:31-46

Before we study this passage, we need to look at the collective judgments of men as given to us in Scripture.

There are basically six collective judgments:

i. The Cross - Romans 6:1-14

When a person believes on Christ as their Saviour, they are identified with Him in his death. (The Greek word *baptizo* from which we get “baptize” means “to be identified fully with”). Because of this identification, our old nature is crucified (past tense) and we become a new creation (now). Furthermore, this identification effectively wipes out all our personal sin as far as God is concerned. We will never be judged for our sin since Christ has already borne it for us on the cross.

ii. The Judgment Seat of Christ - 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, Romans 14:10, and 2 Corinthians 5:10

This judgment, also known as the *bema* judgment, is where each believer will be judged as to reward or loss. It is not a judgment of sin, but a judgment of reward. A good analogy would be the receipt of rewards for athletic

achievements. (The *bema* seat was in fact the judges stand at the early Isthmian games which were a forerunner of the modern Olympic games).

iii. The Living Nations - Matthew 25:31-46, Joel 2

This is the judgment we find in the Olivet Discourse. At this judgment the surviving Gentiles will be judged as to whether they will be allowed to enter the Millennial Kingdom. (Note that the word translated “nations” is *ethne* which means peoples).

iv. Israel - Ezekiel 20:33-44

After the tribulation we are told that 1/3 of Israel will be saved by God (Zechariah 13:8) to populate the Millennial kingdom. However, there will be some Israelites alive who are not believers and thus will not be able to enter the Kingdom. These Jews will be condemned by Jesus Christ to hell.

v. The Great White Throne - Revelation 20:11-15

This is the final judgment of men. We know that all unbelievers will stand at this judgment for final consignment to eternal hell. They will have already known their fate for some time since many have already suffered in hades for several thousand years. This judgment is not as much a determination of destiny as it is a determination of severity of punishment.

vi. Fallen Angels - Jude 6, 2 Peter 2:4

We know very little about this judgment as only two verses in the New Testament refer to it. We basically believe this to be a judgment on fallen angels in order to determine degree of punishment in eternal hell.

We are now ready to look at the text of Matthew 25:31-46.

1. The Judge - Matthew 25:31

- a. The judge is none other than Jesus Christ. The term “Son of Man” is a self-appellation Christ used on earth many times. In every case, He uses it to refer to himself as deity.
- b. Not only do we see Christ in this verse, but we find the angels here as well. Angels are commonly seen as being executors of God's judgment in scripture. Note the following passages:

Ezekiel 9:1-11
Isaiah 37:36
Matthew 13:41-42
2 Thessalonians 1:7-8

2. The Subjects - Matthew 25:32-33

- a. The Gentiles. The actual Greek word is *ethne* which means “people.” Literal nations as we know them are not in view here. (This same word is translated “Gentiles” in Romans 2:14 as well as many other passages in the New Testament)

- b. These Gentiles are the survivors of the horrors of the tribulation period. We are not told how many survive this terrible time of judgment although we know that over half of the world's population will be killed in the wars and judgments of the tribulation.
- c. Note the two classes of Gentiles, sheep and goats. Goats refer to unbelieving Gentiles (the goat is a symbol of Satan in demonic worship), and the sheep refer to believing Gentiles. The Bible often speaks of true believers as sheep (Psalm 23).

3. The Rewarded - Matthew 25:34-40

Before looking at the text, we need to examine a much broader issue, that of the nature of saving faith.

Many times we think that faith and works are unmixable. We equate works with merit and hence believe that they play no part in salvation. That belief is not 100% accurate.

Salvation is obtained by believing what God has told us regarding our sinful condition and His provision for forgiveness. Salvation is *always* by grace through faith. We cannot earn our salvation by doing good, nor can we lose it by sinning (Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5, Acts 16:31). It is true that men in the Old Testament did not know the fullness of what Christ would accomplish at Calvary, but they did believe what God told them. Abraham was justified by faith when he believed God (Romans 4:3-4).

Although works are not a *cause* of salvation, they are a necessary *result*. Faith without works is just as dead as works without faith. Note the following evidence in favor of this.

John 8:31	Jesus tells those that believed on Him that they would be his true disciples if they abode in his words (do what he says).
John 15:1-6	True believers are characterized by fruitfulness. Lack of fruit is evidence that there is no vital connection with the vine which is Christ.
Romans 6:1-14	We have been identified with Christ in his death with the result that our old man has been crucified (past completed action). We are not to be characterized by sin, but by righteousness.
2 Corinthians 5:17	Anyone who places their faith in Christ is a new creation. The word "new" does not mean new in time, but new in essence. We are not a refinished antique but a new creation.
Colossians 3:1-10	We are to put on the new man. Our life is to be characterized by righteousness, not the deeds of the flesh.

- James 2:14-26 Faith without works is dead. Faith in God is externally evidenced by what we do, not what we say.
- 1 John 2:1-6 We find that if we do not keep Christ's commandments, it is because we are not his. One of the evidences for true salvation is a life of obedience.

Note that the above passages do not teach sinless perfection. They teach that if a person claims to be a believer, then that person's life will evidence saving faith by good works.

With the above in mind, we are now ready to look at the text of Matthew 25:34-40.

- a. Who are the rewarded?
- 1). They are sheep which refer to true believers. An examination of the context will show this.
 - 2). They are blessed of the Father.
 - a). In John 14:23-24 we find that those who love the Son are loved by the Father. Furthermore, love for the Son is evidenced by obedience to His commandments (John 14:15).
 - b). This can be illustrated as follows:

If we love the Son then
we will keep his commandments and
we will be loved by the Father and
the Father and the Son will make their abode with us.
 - 3). They are those for whom the Kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world. This is an excellent reference to sovereign election.
 - 4). Their lives have been characterized by godly deeds. These deeds attest to the life of God in them.
 - a). They fed those afflicted by hunger, imprisonment, and physical deprivation.
 - b). Since those they showed mercy to were being persecuted by the Antichrist during the tribulation, they placed themselves in danger.
- b. What is their reward?
- 1). They inherit the Kingdom (Matthew 25:34).
 - 2). This is the same reward mentioned in the Parable of the Dragnet and the Parable of the Tares in Matthew 13.

4. The Condemned - Matthew 25:41-46
 - a. Who are the condemned?
 - 1). It is the goats which refer to unbelievers.
 - 2). The fact that they are unbelievers is evidenced by the fact that their lives are devoid of good works. Keep in mind that it is not the lack of good works that condemns them, but the lack of salvation *which results* in a lack of works that condemns them.
 - 3). Specifically we find that their lack of mercy on those afflicted during the time of tribulation shows their unbelief. They were so interested in their own self preservation that they lost their own souls.
 - b. What is their reward?
 - 1). It is everlasting judgment.
 - 2). It is, in context, exclusion from the Kingdom.