

# 16



## Daniel and the Olivet Discourse

### Review

In chapter 15, I examined the events surrounding the battle of Armageddon that bring the Great Tribulation to an end. Christ appears on a white horse in the celestial realm, merely says the word, and the Antichrist and the armies following him are destroyed. Christ then sends an angel to bind Satan for a thousand years so that Christ's reign over this world can begin. After the millennium, Satan is released and leads one final rebellion of fallen man against God. But this short-lived revolt fails, and Satan is sent to the eternal lake of fire, never to be heard from again.

### The Destruction of the Temple

Any book that deals with the subject of eschatology should wrestle with Christ's Olivet Discourse, a sermon on the end times. In Jerusalem, much of Christ's preaching took place at the temple. Christ and his disciples would retire at night to the Mount of Olives, where the disciples would ask him to further explain his teachings of that day. One day, after leaving the temple with his disciples, Jesus predicted that the temple itself would be destroyed:

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, . . . “Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” (Matt. 24:1–2)

The temple was of immense importance to the Jewish people, and the disciples were shocked by this prediction of its destruction.

In Jewish history, the temple represented God’s spiritual presence on this earth—his house, so to speak. It was a place where people could approach God to worship him. The temple also set Israel apart from pagan nations, which often set up their own temples to worship idols or demons.

The temple had been in existence for more than five hundred years when Jesus predicted its destruction. The last time the temple had been destroyed was during the Babylonian Empire in 586 BC. The Jews had been persistently unfaithful in their covenant with God, despite the repeated warnings of Jeremiah and other prophets. As judgment against Israel for their idol worship, God allowed the Babylonian rulers to destroy the temple and take the Jews into exile.

The prophet Daniel was a young man among these exiles who rose to prominence in the Babylonian government. He was not only a brilliant administrator in their government but also a prophet God used extensively to reveal his endgame for Israel and its temple. When the Jews came out of captivity and returned to Jerusalem, the temple was rebuilt. It is referred to as the “Second Temple.” But Israel was never truly restored.

There are two ways in which the temple could be desecrated, and each is a form of abomination to God:

- When a pagan nation invades Israel and physically destroys the temple
- When a pagan nation in control of Israel imposes a pagan form of worship and sacrifice within the temple itself

The destruction by the Babylonians represents the first form of desolation, and the second form of desecration occurred when the Greek Empire controlled Israel. The Second Temple was not destroyed by an invading army, but it was desecrated when the Greek ruler of that region, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, forced the Jewish high priest to

sacrifice a pig to the pagan god Zeus in the temple. This inspired an insurrection and a war against the Greek Empire, known as the Maccabean Revolt, which succeeded in liberating Jerusalem.

When the Romans conquered Israel, they were mainly interested in gaining material wealth from the country, rather than in spreading their pagan religion. To avoid an insurrection, they wisely did not destroy the temple. They also let the Jewish temple practices remain in place, rather than attempt to impose their pagan forms of worship on the Jewish nation.

### **A Sermon on Daniel**

In his Olivet Discourse, Christ referenced the book of Daniel when he preached about the temple's desolation: "So when you see the abomination of desolation *spoken of by the prophet Daniel*, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)" (Matt. 24:15). Thus, to properly "understand" the future events surrounding Israel's temple, the reader of his discourse needs to *read and understand* Daniel's visions that revolve around Israel and its temple.

I will make the case that Daniel's visions and Jesus' Olivet Discourse foresaw two distinct desolations of the temple: one by the Romans, when the temple is destroyed in AD 70 (similar to the Babylonian destruction), and another by the Antichrist, when he enters a rebuilt temple claiming to be God and sets up an idol of himself to be worshiped (similar to the Greek desolation). The book of Daniel teaches that this last desolation leads to the Great Tribulation, followed by a restored temple in the messianic kingdom when Israel becomes a truly righteous nation.

### **The Temple in the Messianic Kingdom**

Daniel, like several other Jewish prophets, taught that a restored Jewish temple would be at the center of the messianic kingdom. This is problematic because we know that Christ is the ultimate sacrifice for our sins and that the temple sacrifices by the high priest are no longer necessary. It helps to remember, however, that the temple was more than a place for sacrifices to be made for sins. In many cases, the offerings made by the priests on behalf of the people were a form of

thanksgiving to God for a good harvest. It should be noted that James, Peter, and the Jewish believers in Jerusalem continued to gather and worship at the temple for decades until the temple was destroyed. They were not being legalistic or hypocritical. Regardless of the theological difficulty of reconciling another temple with Christ's sacrifice for our sins, the rebuilt temple is an inseparable part of the messianic kingdom.

Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, also foretold a temple during the messianic kingdom. He taught that the Jewish temple will serve the world as a center of worship and prayer, a center of learning and dissemination of truth, and the judicial center for Israel and the world. Chapters 40 through 48 of Ezekiel go into considerable detail about the temple during the messianic kingdom.

The restored temple shows up repeatedly in other messianic prophecies as well. Isaiah referenced a restored Jerusalem with a restored temple in his famous vision of the messianic kingdom:

"I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress."  
 . . . For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream;  
 . . . And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations  
 . . . to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD [an offering of thanksgiving in the restored temple].  
 And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD [restored priestly services]." (Isa. 65:19; 66:12–21)

During the messianic kingdom of peace and prosperity, believing Jews will be brought back to a restored Israel and a restored Jerusalem. And the temple will be restored with priestly services. According to Isaiah, the temple is an inseparable part of the messianic kingdom.

The book of Micah also envisions Jerusalem and its temple as the center of the Messiah's earthly kingdom:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains [Jerusalem and its temple], . . . and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths [a center of learning].” . . . He [the Messiah] shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away [the Messiah rules the world]; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore [global peace]. (Mic. 4:1–3)

One day, the Messiah will restore Jerusalem *and its temple* in an age of righteousness, justice, and peace. These prophecies are clearly describing the messianic kingdom, and the restored temple is an essential component of these prophecies.

The condition of the temple throughout the Scriptures reflects the spiritual condition of Israel. God’s covenant with Israel to protect Jerusalem and its temple from hostile nations was contingent upon the Jews remaining faithful to God’s commandments. When they were repeatedly unfaithful and unrepentant, as they were during the time of Jeremiah and Daniel, God allowed the Babylonians to conquer them, destroy their temple, and take them into exile.

The temple was eventually rebuilt. But there would be another period when the Jews would be unfaithful—when the Messiah came into the world. Yet, even while predicting the temple’s destruction as a form of judgment against the unfaithful Jews, Christ predicted a time in the future when they will repent and be faithful:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it [unfaithful Israel]! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing [unrepentant Israel]! See, your house is left to you desolate [the temple will be destroyed again]. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord [repentant Israel, which leads to the messianic kingdom and the restoration of the temple].” (Matt. 23:37–39)

This covenant with Israel can be outlined as follows:

- Faithful Israel: temple protected and Israel flourishes
- Unfaithful Israel worships pagan idols: temple destroyed by the Babylonians
- Unfaithful Israel rejects their Messiah: temple destroyed by the Romans
- Repentant Israel accepts their Messiah: temple restored during the messianic kingdom

Jesus predicted the temple would be destroyed during the unrepentant generation of those who heard his message. About forty years later, around AD 70, Jewish Zealots started a war against Rome in an attempt to liberate Israel. Rome responded by sending three legions of soldiers to put down this rebellion. They ruthlessly put down the revolt, sacked Jerusalem, and destroyed the temple. The temple walls were made of large cut stones, and its roof contained wooden rafters. Gold was used throughout the temple to adorn its architecture, furnishings, and utensils. When the temple caught fire during the chaos of war, the extensive gold within the temple melted. The molten gold then seeped into the crevices between the stones of the temple walls. After the fire stopped and the molten gold hardened, the Roman soldiers overturned every stone to gain access to the solidified gold sandwiched between the stones. As Jesus predicted, not one stone would be left upon another (Matt. 24:1–2)!

The Jews' rejection of their Messiah led to the destruction of the Second Temple by the pagan Romans. But according to Daniel's visions, this is not the last time the temple will be desecrated by unbelievers. There is a future desolation of a rebuilt temple. It will be perpetrated by the Antichrist when he enters the temple claiming to be God. Daniel refers to this as the final "abomination and desolation." This will be followed by the restoration of the temple in the messianic kingdom when the Jews repent and believe in their Messiah.

### **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream**

Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler of the Babylonian Empire when God began to give Daniel visions of the future. Daniel had one main vision, which was an interpretation of a dream of Nebuchadnezzar's.

The dream was of a human figure divided into five sections. Each section represents one of five great empires and its impact on Israel, its temple, and the world.

All these kingdoms are led by sinful men influenced in one way or another by Satan, the god of this world. They are greedy and ambitious leaders, often going on rampages to conquer other nations in order to create extravagant wealth for themselves and their people. In the process, thousands of men, women, and children are killed or enslaved.

Almost all these leaders become deluded into thinking they are gods and demand to be worshiped. Daniel himself faced such a leader, refused to worship the Babylonian rulers, and was thrown into the lions' den.

The last section of the human figure in Daniel's vision represents the kingdom of the Antichrist, when Satan is unleashed on the world. When this last kingdom is destroyed, all these evil kingdoms led by sinful humans come to an end, and the messianic kingdom becomes a reality.

Many theologians do not believe in a future messianic kingdom revolving around Israel. They understand this vision to represent only four kingdoms, with the last one being the Roman Empire, which was in power when Christ came into the world. Christ defeats Satan at the cross and then sets up his kingdom. Christ's kingdom may have begun during the Roman Empire, but it is obvious that his reign of peace and prosperity has not yet begun.

As I quote Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, I will enumerate the five sinful human kingdoms inspired by Satan. The stone in the vision represents the Messiah. When he destroys the fifth kingdom, all these kingdoms will come to an end and the messianic kingdom will begin. Christ's empire will be a kingdom that will never be destroyed:

You saw, . . . a great image. . . . The head of this image was of fine gold [one], its chest and arms of silver [two], its middle and thighs of bronze [three], its legs of iron [four], its feet partly of iron and partly of clay [five]. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces [during the fifth kingdom]. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together

were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors [all sinful human empires come to an end]; . . . But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth [the messianic kingdom]. . . . the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. (Dan. 2:31–44)

These kingdoms can be identified as follows:

- The head of “fine gold” represents the Babylonian Empire.
- The “chest and arms of silver” represent the Medo-Persian Empire.
- The “middle and thighs of bronze” represent the Greek Empire.
- The “legs of iron” represent the Roman Empire.
- And the “feet partly of iron and partly of clay” represent the reign of the Antichrist during the seven-year Tribulation.

When this last kingdom is crushed by the Messiah, the messianic kingdom will begin, which is a kingdom “that shall never be destroyed.”

Like many theologians today, the rabbinic teaching in Jesus’ day misinterpreted Daniel’s vision to represent only four great kingdoms. They believed the “legs of iron” and its “feet of iron and clay,” together represented the Roman Empire. As a result, they expected the stone, or the Messiah, to arrive on the scene at any time to crush the fourth-kingdom Roman Empire and set up the messianic kingdom. The Messiah would set up a worldwide empire centered in Israel that would never be invaded or destroyed again.

Consequently, expectations among first-century Jews (including the disciples) for the Messiah to overthrow the Roman Empire and set up his own Jewish-led, worldwide empire were quite enlivened. The Romans were keenly aware of these messianic rumblings, which explains their sensitivity toward any possible insurrection led by a Jewish Messiah.

But, as the Jews discovered, much to their disappointment, Jesus of Nazareth did not overthrow the Roman Empire and set up his messianic kingdom on this earth. Instead, he was crucified by the Romans. Pontius Pilate even mocked this feeble “stone,” or powerless Jewish Messiah, when his soldiers placed a purple robe on him and

put a crown of thorns on his head. He further mocked him with an inscription on his cross that read “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19). A dead Jewish Messiah was hardly a threat to their powerful empire.

Instead of the “legs of iron” being crushed by the supernatural stone, Christ was crushed by the legs of iron. Furthermore, through its efficient war machine, the Roman Empire continued to extend itself throughout the Mediterranean world, reaching as far into Europe as England. Rome’s military of iron kept them in power for centuries. The messianic kingdom surely did not begin with the defeat of the Roman Empire. Since Christ left this earth and ascended to his Father in heaven, wars and rumors of war have continued unabated, just as he predicted.

The first-century Jews failed to consider an important detail in Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The stone does not crush Rome’s legs of iron; rather, it crushes the feet of iron and clay that belong to the fifth kingdom. When the fifth part of the image is destroyed by the supernatural stone, the image of satanic warring kingdoms—from head to toe—comes to an end and the Messiah sets up his kingdom:

As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its *feet of iron and clay*, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces. (Dan. 2:34–35)

Once the “stone” destroys the fifth kingdom, “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.” This corresponds to the teachings of Revelation. The Christ, or the stone, will crush the beasts of Satan at the battle of Armageddon, bind Satan, and rule the world as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Messiah came into this world during the fourth-kingdom Roman Empire, but he was crushed by the legs of iron. His reign of peace and righteousness over this earth did not begin at that time. Instead, after making atonement for the sins of his people, Christ left this world and ascended to the Ancient of Days in heaven, where he remains today waiting on the Father to determine when his reign will begin.

## Inauguration Day

But when does Christ's inauguration as the Lord of this world begin? According to Daniel, the Ancient of Days inaugurates the Messiah's reign immediately after a particular ruler during the fifth kingdom is destroyed. The fifth kingdom is the short reign of the Antichrist over the world. Daniel refers to him as a horn of a fourth beast:

Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest [exceptionally evil], . . . the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them [during the Great Tribulation], until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom [inauguration day]. (Dan. 7:19–22)

Notice that the messianic kingdom begins immediately after the Antichrist's reign of terror comes to an end. Daniel repeats this pattern of the messianic kingdom following the Antichrist's reign several times to stress its importance:

He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time [three and a half years of the Great Tribulation]. But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end [the Antichrist's fifth kingdom is crushed]. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. (Dan. 7:25–27)

According to Daniel's visions, the promised messianic kingdom starts immediately after the reign of the Antichrist comes to an end. This pattern is so prevalent in Daniel's visions that it becomes an axiom, or self-evident truth. This axiom can be outlined as follows:

Michael is removed + Satan is unrestrained + Antichrist is revealed + Great Tribulation is endured + Antichrist is destroyed  
= the messianic kingdom is inaugurated

This is the same pattern found in Revelation. After Satan's kingdom of the Antichrist is destroyed at the battle of Armageddon, Christ's 1,000-year messianic kingdom begins.