

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE: PAST (PRETERIST), PRESENT, AND/OR FUTURE?

Dr. Douglas Finkbeiner
Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary
Lansdale, PA

*In this session, we are exploring the time referents in the Eschatological Discourse. Due to time constraints, I will not be discussing possible parallels between Matthew 24-25 and I Thessalonians 4-5, or the relationship between the referents in this discourse and the referents in the book of Revelation. Neither will we explore the Second Coming in relationship to the Rapture question from this text. The following material, though, is foundational to such discussions.

I. A look at the key texts in the Synoptic gospels (Observations)

A. Inclusion and arrangements of the material (taken from Aland's synopsis)

***Bold** represents unique passages; *italics* represents material outside of the Olivet Discourse proper; and normal font represents parallel texts.

Matthew 24-25	Mark 13	Luke 21
24:1-2	13:1-2	21:5-6
24:3-8	13:3-8	21:7-11
24:9-14	13:9-13	21:12-19 (cf. Mt. 10)
24:15-22	13:14-20	21:20-24
24:23-28	13:21-23	<i>(17:23-24)</i>
24:29-31	13:24-27	21:25-28
24:32-36	13:28-32	21:29-33
	13:33-37 (conclusion)	
		21:34-36 (conclusion)
24:37-44		<i>(17:26-36; 12:39-40)</i>
24:45-51		<i>(12:41-46)</i>
25:1-13		<i>(12:35-38)</i>
25:14-30		<i>(cf. 19:11-27)</i>
25:31-46		

*My breakdown for the 7th section differs slightly in B.2.

B. Some interesting details within the material

1. Differences in the initial questions

*Note the nuancing of Matthew's account with an additional question and the simplicity of Luke's account.

<p>KJV Matthew 24:3 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 <i>shall be</i> the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?</p> <p>NAU Matthew 24:3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what <i>will be</i> the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"</p> <p>BNT Matthew 24:3 Καθημένου δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τῶν ἐλαιῶν προσῆλθον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ κατ' ἰδίαν λέγοντες· εἰπὲ ἡμῖν, πότε ταῦτα ἔσται καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος;</p>	<p>KJV Mark 13:3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 Tell us, when shall these things be? and what <i>shall be</i> the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?</p> <p>NAU Mark 13:3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what <i>will be</i> the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?"</p> <p>BNT Mark 13:3 Καὶ καθημένου αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν κατέναντι τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐπηρώτα αὐτὸν κατ' ἰδίαν Πέτρος καὶ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωάννης καὶ Ἀνδρέας· 4 εἰπὸν ἡμῖν, πότε ταῦτα ἔσται καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον ὅταν μέλλῃ ταῦτα συντελεῖσθαι πάντα;</p>	<p>KJV Luke 21:7 And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign <i>will there be</i> when these things shall come to pass?</p> <p>NAU Luke 21:7 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what <i>will be</i> the sign when these things are about to take place?"</p> <p>BNT Luke 21:7 Ἐπηρώτησαν δὲ αὐτὸν λέγοντες· διδάσκαλε, πότε οὖν ταῦτα ἔσται καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον ὅταν μέλλῃ ταῦτα γίνεσθαι;</p>
--	--	---

2. Time indicators in the the accounts—

*Matthew 24:4-14=Mark 13:5-13=Luke 21:8-19— Realities prior to the end

– Note the specific mention of a time before the end (Mt. 24:6=Mk. 13:7; Mt. 24:14) and birth pangs (Mt. 24:8=Mk. 13:8). Note the ‘but before this’ of Lk. 21:12.

*Matthew 24:15-28=Mark 13:14-23=Luke 21:20-24— A time of destruction and great tribulation in conjunction with Jerusalem.

– The description in Matthew and Mark is heightened over the description in Luke and contains a clear Danielic background (Mt. 24:15,21=Mk. 13:14,19). Note also Luke’s inclusion of “the times of the Gentiles” following the destruction of Jerusalem (Lk. 21:24).

*Matthew 24:29-31=Mark 13:24-27=Luke 21:25-28— The Coming of the Son of Man.

– Note the time proximity to the tribulation (Mt. 24:29=Mk. 13:24). Note the time proximity to “the times of the Gentiles” (Lk.21:24).

*Matthew 24:32-35=Mark 13:28-31=Luke 21:29-33—The nearness of the prophecy.

– Note the difficulty in interpreting “these things” (Mt. 24:33=Mk. 13:29=Lk. 21:31) and “generation” (Mt. 24:34=Mk. 13:30=Lk. 21:32).

*Matthew 24:36-41ff; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-36— Vigilance in light of imminent coming

– Mt. 24:36 =Mk.13:32.

– Unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew contains a lengthy section of exhortation following the exposition (about 2/3 of the overall discourse).

II. A look at the proposed options (Interpretations)–

A. Brief description of options

*A seminal article on this issue is by “The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments,” by David Turner, pgs. 3-27 (Grace Theological Journal, 1989). I am adding two additional positions (revised preterist, revised futurist) to his four original positions (preterist, futurist, traditional preterist-futurist, revised preterist-futurist) and visualizing it in a chart. For a lengthier discussion, see his article. I have listed a select list of representatives for the following positions. Several of the writers have given their position in commentaries (Toussaint; Barbieri; Lane; Bock; France; Carson; Blomberg) and others have given their position in articles or theological books (Wright, McKnight, Turner, Bock, Blomberg, Lowry).

1. A general description of the traditional positions–



- a. Preterist position– Emphasis upon the first century and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 [N. T. Wright; McKnight]
- b. Futurist position– Emphasis upon the eschatological tribulation and the return of Christ. [Toussaint; Barbieri]
- c. Preterist-Futurist position– a combination of the two previous views, with a recognition of patterning concerning the tribulation and descriptions of the Church Age [Lane; Turner; Bock]

2. An acknowledgment of revisions within the positions– Within all of the positions, there are proponents who have revised the traditional positions.

- a. Revised Preterist position– An acknowledgment of an eschatological end in Mk. 13:32-37 and Matt. 24:36ff [France]
- b. Revised Futurist– Matthew 24:4-14 refers to the Church Age while Matthew 24:15-28 refers to the eschatological end primarily [Lowry]
- c. Revised Preterist-Futurist position– Matthew 24:15-21 can be applied to A.D. 70 with vss. 22-28 resuming the topic of events during the Church Age [Carson; cf. Blomberg with slight variation].

B. A chart of the proposed positions using Matthew and Mark:

*The following chart moves from one polarized position (preterist) through graduated positions (revised preterist, revised preterist-futurist, preterist-futurist, revised futurist) to another polarized position (futurist).

Mt. 24:4-14 Mk. 13:5-13	Mt. 24:15-28 Mk. 13:14-23	Mt. 24:29-31 Mk. 13:24-27	Mt. 24:32-35 Mk. 13:28-31	Mt. 24:36ff Mk. 13:32-37
Preterist:  AD 70	Preterist A.D. 70	Preterist A.D. 70	Preterist A.D. 70	Preterist A.D. 70
Revised Pret  AD 70	Revised Pret A.D. 70	Revised Pret A.D. 70	Revised Pret A.D. 70	Revised Pret Second Coming
Rev Pret-fut: Church Age	Rev Pret-fut A.D. 70 (vss. 15-21); Church Age (vss. 22-28)	Rev Pret-fut Second Coming	Rev Pret-fut Second Coming	Rev Pret-fut Second Coming
Pret-futurist: Church Age	Pret-futurist: A.D. 70/ End Time	Pret-futurist: Second Coming	Pret-futurist: Second Coming	Pret-futurist: Second Coming
Rev futurist: Church Age	Rev futurist: End Time primarily	Rev futurist: Second Coming	Rev futurist: Second Coming	Rev futurist: Second Coming
Futurist: Tribulation	Futurist: End Time only	Futurist: Second Coming	Futurist: Second Coming	Futurist: Second Coming

III. Toward a solution–

*A preterist-futurist position is most viable. A revised futurist position and a revised preterist-futurist position are viable; a futurist position is less likely; and both preterist positions are unlikely.

*Evidence for a preterist-futurist position is as follows:

A. Indicators within the text (a textual argument)

1. Indicators within the Eschatological Discourse

*Matthew (and Mark to a lesser degree) highlights the final eschatological judgment while Luke highlights the first century judgment upon Israel.

a. Note the initial question asked by the disciples– Matthew 24:3

contains an addition that clearly highlights the distant future; Luke 21:7 highlights the events of A.D. 70.

b. Note the language used to describe the judgment—

*Unlike Luke’s account, the language of tribulation in Matthew and Mark is heightened and climactic.

– “the desolating sacrifice spoken by the prophet Daniel” in Mt. 24:15=Mk. 13:14 is omitted in Luke 21:20.

– The climactic language of Mt. 24:21-22=Mk. 13:19-20 is omitted in Lk. 21:23-24.

c. Note the time indicator in Luke 21:24—

– The Jews will be dispersed among the nations

– Jerusalem will be trodden under foot until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

*For parallels with the accounts in the Gospels surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, see Josephus’ *Jewish War*. For specific parallels, see McKnight, *A New Vision For Israel*, 141.

d. Note the connection between the near and the far in Matthew 24:32-36= Mk. 13:28-32= Lk. 21:29-33 . Note Matthew 16:27-28.

2. Indicators within the Synoptic Gospels—

a. The immediate context of the Eschatological Discourse in Matthew (23:37-39; cf. Lk. 13:34), moves from the coming judgment upon the nation in A.D. 70 to the second coming of Christ.

b. The Synoptic Gospels focus upon the near and the far.

(1) The near judgment of A.D. 70 can be seen in Matthew 21:41-44 and 22:7.

(2) The lengthy period of difficulty marked by opportunity for followers of Christ can be seen in Matthew 10:23 along with Matthew 24:14 (note the larger context of both).

(3) The Second Coming of Christ can be in 13:41-44; 16:27-28; 25:31; and 26:64 along with its occurrences in Matthew 24. See also Acts 1:6-7; 3:20-21.

*The preterists have not sufficiently considered all these passages as they try to argue that Christ's coming is bound up in the destruction of A.D. 70 from Matthew 10:23; Matthew 16:28; and Matthew 24:34 (cf. McKnight, 128ff).

B. The nature of prophecy (a genre argument)

1. Within prophecy, there is often the connection of events separated by an extended period of time.

*Note the usage of Is. 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19 and Is. 35:5 in Matthew 11:5 and Luke 7:22.

*Note the usage of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21. Although it is controversial, note also the usage of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:16-18.

2. Within prophecy, there is often the blending of events separated by an extended period of time— this is often identified as typology.

- a. Descriptions—

“Another key feature of the speech is that it works with eschatological ‘pattern.’ This approach to describing prophetic events is common in the Old Testament. The example of the Day of the Lord is instructive. The ‘Day’ in the prophets often referred to a short-term judgment in such a way that it pictures what the final, decisive judgment will be like. Thus, the temple destruction pictures a period of intense disruption that is like the end. One event is the pattern for the other or mirrors the other. So it appears that the destruction of the temple, which we know now came in A.D. 70, also pictures the type of period that characterizes the end.” (Bock, Jesus According to the Scriptures, 338-339)

“Advocates of this approach argue that a common feature of biblical prediction is the complexity of its fulfillment. Several terms, such as ‘prophetic foreshortening,’ ‘prophetic outlook/perspective,’ ‘double fulfillment,’ ‘comprehensive character,’ and ‘generic fulfillment’ have been coined to describe this difficult phenomenon. Applied to this passage, this idea is that the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem betokens and anticipates the ultimate eschatological time of the end. The prophet necessarily uses the particularistic language of his own time to describe both the anticipatory and consummatory aspects of his prediction. The prophet does not perceive the historic gap between the two aspects of his prophecy. Indeed, to speak of two aspects is possible only

from the perspective of hindsight, a luxury available only to the modern scholar. Rather, the prophet, in this case Jesus, sees the events as a unity. In this case that unity centers in the abomination of desolation, which has already been demonstrated to involve a complex series of events in the book of Daniel.” (Turner, 13).

- b. An example– Messianic psalms

Conclusion: Although the Eschatological Discourse was all future from the perspective of the first disciples, from our perspective there are past, present, and future elements.