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A STUDY OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE • MATTHEW 24 & 25



FELLOWSHIP
BIBLE CHURCH

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PREFACE



On the eve of his execution in Rome, Paul penned his second epistle to Timothy. His concluding words reveal his hopeful focus. He writes,

“...the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica...” (2 Timothy 4:6b-10).

What a contrast! Paul’s love for the world to come compared to Demas, who loved this “present world.” As with God and money, one cannot love two opposing entities at the same time.

In this passage, Paul exemplifies an amazing eternal focus. He had no fear, even as he faced imminent death. Paul possessed a sense of confidence of his future appearance before the King, anticipating reward. Both of these qualities were the fruit of a life that longed for Christ’s return.

As we begin examining the prophetic words of Jesus, known as the Olivet Discourse, we can feel hopeful that this focus can also be ours. Fear of death can be weakened. Perspectives and choices can be adjusted in order to be more confident when we stand before Jesus Christ. Finally, affections for the present world can be decreased and be replaced with a heartfelt longing for the King’s return.

Both the Old and New Testaments contain a significant amount of information about future prophetic events. The study of these events is known as eschatology, from the Greek term *eschatos*, meaning “last thing.”

Diligent study is necessary to reconcile the various prophetic contributions of the biblical books. Peter writes, “No prophecy of Scripture is of its own interpretation.”(2 Peter 1:21). As men were guided by the Holy Spirit to write the prophetic Scriptures, no single biblical passage or book contains all the information on the subject. Hodges explains. “Thus one Author stands behind

every Scriptural prophecy, namely, the Spirit of God. The result is a series of interconnected, harmonious utterances which cannot be correctly understood independently from one another.”¹

The prophetic teaching of Jesus, entitled the Olivet Discourse, is recorded in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Other than the book of Revelation, the Olivet Discourse is the longest prophetic passage in the New Testament. This discourse provides the valuable information that allows us to connect the events recorded in the Old Testament (particularly the book of Daniel) with those in the New.

Jesus spoke the discourse on the Mount of Olives, the very location of His return as recorded by the prophet, Zechariah, (Zechariah 14:4). His timing was beautifully played out as it would lovingly provide hope for His disciples who were about to witness His crucifixion.

The Olivet Discourse provides believers with more knowledge of God’s program and what’s in store for this world. But God’s intent is more than to know. The discourse is meant to point Christians to a greater eagerness and readiness for the Savior’s arrival. As God’s plan unfolds we can experience a deeper abiding relationship in Christ, “that we not shrink away in shame at His coming.” (1 John 2:28)

Let’s get started.

Don Den Hartog
Pastor of Biblical Education
Fellowship Bible Church

¹ Zane Hodges, *Second Peter, Shunning Error in Light of the Savior’s Return* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2015), 51.

INTRODUCTION



Prior to examining the text of the Olivet Discourse, introductory matters are in order. Attention to the subject, role, and structure of the discourse will aid the listener in both interpreting and applying the contents of the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 24-25.

The Subject of the Olivet Discourse

Christians vary in their interpretation of the Olivet Discourse. Some believe the events described by Jesus have been fulfilled in the past, namely, in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Others believe the events are still future and immediately precede the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Both views are held by committed Christians who long for the return of Jesus. It is not the purpose of this booklet to enter into a lengthy discussion of the differences.

This series presents the Olivet Discourse from a futuristic view—meaning, the events described in Matthew 24-25 are yet to be fulfilled. Jesus did prophecy concerning both the destruction of Jerusalem and events preceding His second coming. What Jesus does not tell us is the duration of time between these two events.

Ultimately, one has to decide whether the terms used by Jesus in the discourse are best understood as figurative, referring to the Roman invasion and destruction of the city or, on the other hand, whether there is a gap of undisclosed time between 70 AD and the events of the final years just prior to Christ's return. This series is based on the latter and therefore sees the subject of the Olivet Discourse outlining some of the future events just preceding the return of Jesus Christ.

The Role of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew's Gospel

Even though many Jews did believe in Jesus as the Messiah in the first century, the fact remains that the majority did not. Jesus offered the kingdom to the nation of Israel. But instead, the Jewish people arranged for His crucifixion.

The kingdom was offered again by the apostles, as recorded in the book of Acts; but once again, the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah. Notice Acts begins with the disciples' question concerning the kingdom, and the book closes with a

statement that the kingdom was being declared and offered.

Scholars agree that due to the contents of the book, Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience. Absent of a clear evangelistic message, this also leads to the conclusion the first readers of Matthew were believers.

With the majority of Israel rejecting Jesus as Messiah, a believing Jew would wonder if the kingdom promises of the Old Testament were now canceled and, therefore, their anticipation of the Messiah's reign was now relinquished.

Matthew's Gospel brings renewed hope by revealing that Jesus taught, after His rejection, that even though the promised kingdom was being postponed, it was not canceled. The promises would be fulfilled in His return. That's where the Olivet Discourse fits into the narrative of Matthew's Gospel.

It is interesting to note that the Gospel of Matthew also contains a Gentile emphasis. Mention of the Magi, the Centurion, the Canaanite woman, and the command to go into "all the world" and make disciples demonstrates God's offer of salvation to the Gentiles.

Matthew is also the only Gospel writer who includes the word "church" within his narrative. In Matthew 16:18 Matthew records the words of Jesus: "I will build My Church." This statement was made after Israel's rejection of Christ and indicates Matthew's communication to his readers that a new program commenced, the Church of Jesus Christ.

The church age was not previously revealed during the Old Testament period but has been instituted under the sovereign plan of God following the rejection of Jesus by Israel. The church age is the dispensation we are presently experiencing but will come to an end when the events of the second coming of Christ commence. No one knows, other than the Father, when the church age will be completed.

Even though Jews continued to be invited to believe in Jesus and be a part of this "mystery kingdom," the Church, the last two thousand years demonstrate the response to Jesus as Messiah has been primarily, but not totally, from the Gentiles.

Yet, God's promises remain. Israel would be delivered from her enemies and the kingdom of God will be established on earth! Those kingdom promises would eventually be fulfilled when Israel eventually believes in Jesus. When He returns, the millennial kingdom will begin and God's promises all throughout the Old Testament will finally be fulfilled.

Dr. Stanley Toussaint summarizes the overall purpose of Matthew's Gospel:

Matthew then presents the kingdom program in three aspects. First, the earthly literal kingdom was offered to Israel in the person of Jesus, the Messiah, at His first coming. Second, the kingdom was postponed because Israel rejected its Messiah. This postponed kingdom will be established at Christ's second coming. Third, Christ Jesus is now engaged in building His church, composed of those who in this age are the heirs of the kingdom.²

In summary, the promised kingdom has been postponed, due to Israel's rejection. But the good news is that it has not been canceled. As Paul writes, "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). God is true to His promises.³

The Structure of the Olivet Discourse

Three main sections comprise the discourse: the sequence of tribulation events that lead to the second coming (Matthew 24:3-35), the opening event of the parousia (Matthew 24:36-44), and the four parables emphasizing readiness of believers for the King's return (Matthew 24:45-25:30).

The first two sections answer the disciples' two questions concerning the timing and the sign of the return of Jesus and end of the age. As the series will demonstrate, these two questions are answered in the reverse order in which they were given. This is a literary device called chiasm. More will be focused on that in the series.

The third section is a series of four parables. The parables are similar in that they pertain to an accounting before the King after His return. Yet, the parables are also distinct in that they address different aspects of that accounting. The series will elaborate on these distinctions.

Key Terms in the Olivet Discourse

Defining certain terms is crucial to the interpretation of the discourse. The following introduces and defines a few key Greek words used in the Olivet Discourse. Koine Greek, of course, is the original language of all the New Testament books.

Parousia: Used four times in the discourse, this term means "coming." It can refer to the process of the "coming." For example, if someone is "coming" to your house for dinner; that process includes leaving their own home, getting in their car, driving to your neighborhood, parking their car, and walking to the front door. The person has "coming."

Erchomai: Used seventeen times in the discourse, this term also means and is translated as “coming.” However, it can refer to coming at a specific point in time. For example, when the person coming for dinner walks into your house, they have “come.”

In light of these two distinct words, the Olivet Discourse addresses the events that surround the second coming but also the specific point in time of the arrival of Jesus Christ.

Airo: Used five times in the discourse, the term is defined as “to take away.” This word can carry the idea of “to thrust away.”

Paralambano: Used two times in the discourse, the term is defined as “to receive.” Even though also translated as “taken,” the idea of this term is different in that it can carry the idea of “to welcome.”

Both of these terms are used in the context of Matthew 24:36-44 when Jesus answers the disciples’ first question concerning the timing of the events surrounding the second coming. The distinction of these terms will be addressed in the series.

Topics *not* included in the Olivet Discourse (but are in other prophetic Scriptures, especially in the book of Revelation):

1. The descriptions and roles of the man of sin (beast of the sea) and the false prophet (the beast of the land).
2. The specific details of the duration of the described events preceding the second coming.
3. More detailed descriptions of the catastrophes from the natural world.
4. The gathering of the nations of the world to invade Jerusalem and more description of the second coming.
5. The establishment of the millennial kingdom and the creation of the new heavens and earth.

Recommended resources for further study are listed in the back of this booklet, corresponding to the six presentations of the series. It is in hope that this booklet provides helpful and foundational information as we begin our study of this significant prophetic section of God’s Word to us, the Olivet Discourse as recorded in Matthew 24-25.

² Dr. Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold The King, A Study of Matthew*, Portland, Oregon, Multnomah Press 1980, page 20.

³ It is recommended one listen to the sermon by Mark Carey, presented at FBC on June 30, 2019, regarding Paul’s use of Isaiah in Romans 9-11. This same theme is reiterated concerning God’s irrevocable promises to Israel. In spite of Israel’s unbelief, the kingdom will be established when Israel does believe prior to the second coming of Christ.

SERMON ONE



Severe Turbulence Ahead!

Matthew 24:3-28

Introductory Matters Pertaining to the Olivet Discourse:

1. Jesus is the greatest “Prophet” (Deuteronomy 18:18). Spoken from place of His return (Zechariah 14:1-5).
2. Matthew’s message: Kingdom is postponed but not canceled.
3. The Discourse is the bridge that reconciles prophecies of the Old and New Testaments.
4. The events of Matthew 24:3-28 take place over a seven-year span of time, each year consisting of 360 days (lunar calendar). This period is broken into two periods of 1260 days each or 42 months or “times, times, and a half of time” (Revelation 11:2-3, 12:6, 14, 13:5, 7). Compare Daniel 9:24-27, the prophecy of 70 weeks.
5. Two questions by the disciples and answers of Jesus form the first section, 24:3-44.
6. Two Greek terms translated as “coming”:

Parousia includes the surrounding events and span of time included in the coming of Jesus. (Matthew uses four times, all in Matthew 24).

Erkomenon references specific points in time of the actual coming of Jesus.

I. The Disciples Ask Two Questions • Matthew 24:3

- A. Jesus answers the second question first, and the first question last. This known as a chiasm.
- B. The second question is answered in 24:3-31.

II. The Answer of Jesus to the second question: The Signs of His Coming and End of the Age • Matthew 24:3-31

A. The Beginning of Sorrows/Labor Pains/Contractions (*odin*) • 24:3-14

1. Religious deception, international conflict and natural catastrophes will be prevalent. (24:4-7)
2. These events are the “beginning.” Things get worse! (24:8)
3. Worldwide Christian persecution, false teaching, and self-preservation grow. (24:8-12)
4. Yet, some believers survive and world evangelization occurs. (24:13-14)

B. The Mid-Point: The Abomination of Desolation • 24:15-20

1. Daniel, 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation give more detail to the man of sin, also called the Beast of the Sea. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-6, Revelation 13:1-10)
2. For those refusing to worship his image in the temple must flee. (24:16-20)

C. The Great Sorrows/Labor Pains/Contractions (*thlipsis*) • 24:21-2

1. Devastating and universal catastrophic events. (24:21)
2. God sets a limit to this period. (24:22)
3. False christs continue. (24:23-26)
4. The return of Jesus will be swift. The “eagles” could mean birds of prey or possibly the gathering of world armies, sourced in the New Roman Empire who invade Jerusalem. (24:27-28)

PAROUSIA

BIRTH PANGS

*ABOMINATION OF
DESOLATION*

*GREAT
BIRTH PANGS*

Applications:

- a. Our Captain is never caught off guard by CAT.

- b. Our Captain puts limits on duration and severity of turbulence.

- c. Our Captain guarantees our safe arrival to our perfect destination.

Conclusion:

SERMON TWO



Severe Turbulence Diverted (for Believers)

Matthew 24:29-44

D. The second coming • 24:29-31

E. The Parable of the Fig Tree • 24:32-35

The book of Revelation goes into much more detail in listing and describing the events of these seven years. Sets of judgments called the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls outline the catastrophic details in Revelation 4-19.

III. The Answer of Jesus to the First Question: When Will These Things Be? Matthew 24:36-44

- A. Only the Father knows when the Sorrows/Birth Pangs and Great Sorrows/Birth Pangs will begin. (24:36)
- B. Prior Characteristics (24:37-44)
 - 1. Before these signs commence, life will be appearing joyful and peaceful, just as the days prior to Noah's flood. (24:37-38)
 - 2. Discarding Noah's centuries of warning, the flood thrust/took (airo) the people into the waters of judgment. (24:38-39)

3. Noah and family, however, “entered into the ark” and were delivered from the judgment waters. (24:38b)
4. So, too, life will be going on as normal with hopes of a future when one will “be taken.” (The word “taken” is *paralambano*, meaning “to receive.” It is the same word used in John 14:3.)
5. People will be occupied with daily affairs (i.e. food preparation, agriculture) when one is taken, another left.
6. This “coming” in 24:42 is *erkomenon*, an event at an unexpected time, illustrated by the thief.
7. Matthew 24:44 introduces the theme of the four subsequent parables. Since we do not know the time, be ready.

The event discussed in 24:36-44 is often called the “rapture.” Some argue against the doctrine of the rapture by saying the term is not used in the New Testament. Technically that is incorrect. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the Greek word *arpazo* is translated in the Latin Bible as *rapturo*, from which the term *rapture* is derived. The English translation of *arpazo* is “caught up.”

This event is also described in further detail in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. Paul also instructs believers they will be “saved/delivered from the wrath to come” in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, forming an *inclusio*.

Just as Noah and his family were saved from the waters of judgment, so, too, believers will be “taken” and diverted from the judgments of the *parousia*, the

sorrows and great sorrows preceding the second coming of Jesus to earth.

**Summary Chart of the First and Second Sections of the Olivet Discourse •
Matthew 24:3-44**



Applications:

1. Today is a day to build, not to mourn.

2. Today is only for a time. The best is yet to come.

3. The Characteristics and Practices of the Evil Servant (24:48-50)

4. The Recompense for the Evil Servant (24:51)

a. “Cut in two” (cf. Hebrews 4:12)

b. Portioned with hypocrites

c. “Weeping and gnashing of teeth”

Applications:

1. Spiritual decline is inevitable when one stops looking for the Master’s return.
2. In God’s eyes, treatment of our fellow servants is first and foremost.
3. God promises mercy to the merciful.

SERMON FOUR



The Ten Virgins and the Fitness Report

Matthew 25:1-13

- B. The Parable of the 10 Virgins • Matthew 25:1-13
 - 1. The Virgins to Meet the Bridegroom (25:1-2)
 - 2. The Foolish Virgins Do Not Take Oil Reserves (25:3)
 - 3. The Wise Virgins Do Take Oil Reserves (25:4)
 - 4. The Sleeping of the 10 Virgins (25:5)
 - 5. The Midnight Cry and the Virgins Awake (25:6-7)
 - 6. The Depletion of the Foolish Virgins' Oil and Departure (25:8-10)
 - 7. The Foolish Virgins' Departure to the Sellers and Their Return (25:11-12)
 - 8. The Lesson of the Parable (25:13)

Application for Tribulation Saints:

Applications for Church-Age Saints:

- 1. Spiritual reserves are necessary for spiritual challenges.
- 2. Spiritual reserves are deposited in advance, not borrowed in crisis.

SERMON FIVE



Living Before the Audience of One

Matthew 25:14-30

*The Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27) and Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)
Compared and Contrasted*

Similarities:

One Master, Three Servants, all receive assets, third has no gain or reward.

Contrasts:

Minas; all start with the same amount but first and second gain differing rewards.

Talents; all start with different amounts but first and second gain same reward.

C. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

1. The talents are distributed in three differing denominations. (25:14-15)
2. The talents are distributed “according to his own ability.” (25:15)
3. The first two servants both double their investment and receive the same reward. (25:16-17, 19-23)
4. The third servant hides his talent and is reprimanded. (25:18, 24-27)

5. The one talent is given to the servant with ten talents. (25:28-29)

6. “Outer darkness” can be translated “the darkness outside.” (25:30)
(See artist depiction.)

*A word about the time of the Judgment Seat of Christ and a life invested in eternal matters.

Applications and Observations:

1. Fear of failure and undervaluing service makes the “one talent” person more vulnerable to laziness and unfruitful living.

2. This parable illustrates the power of the King’s words.

3. God holds me accountable only for what He has entrusted to me, no one else!
(There will be surprises at the Judgment Seat of Christ!)

SERMON SIX



At The End of the Day *Matthew 25:31-46*

The Context of the Second Coming and World Evangelization:

Compare Revelation 14:1-5, 20:4.

- D. The Assessment of the Sheep and the Goats • Matthew 25:31-46
 - 1. The Judgment of the Sheep (25:31-40)
 - a. The Setting of this Judgment (25:31-33)
 - b. The Reward/Inheritance Granted to the Sheep (25:34)
 - c. The Basis of the Reward/Inheritance for the Sheep (25:35-40)
 - 2. The Judgment of the Goats • Matthew 25:41-45
 - a. The Eternal Destiny of the Goats (25:41)
 - b. The Refusal by the Goats (25:42-45)

3. The Eternal Destiny of the Sheep and the Goats • Matthew 25:46

a. The Destiny of the Goats Repeated (25:46a)

b. The Destiny/Transformation of the Sheep (25:46b)

Applications and Observations:

1. The Sheep set an example for Church-age saints as well.
2. God sees the treatment of His servants as the treatment of His Son.
3. Nothing experienced in this world is as good as what receiving commendation from the King will be!

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR FURTHER READING



Sermon One • “Severe Turbulence Ahead”

Zane Hodges taught NT Greek and exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary for 27 years and served as the Chairman of the New Testament and Greek Department. He received his B.A. from Wheaton College and Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary. He has authored commentaries on the Johannine Epistles, James, and Romans, along with other books pertaining to soteriology, eternal rewards, and eschatology.

The recommended resource for Sermon #1 is his shorter work *Jesus, God’s Prophet*, where Hodges addresses the events and parables of the Olivet Discourse as recorded in Matthew.

For a thorough discussion of the 70 weeks and the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27, read John Claeys, *The Coming Apocalypse, The Ticking of the End Time Clock*, Chapter 4, “Seventy Sevens,” pp. 31-40.

Claeys, John. *The Coming Apocalypse, The Ticking of the End Time Clock.* Sisters, OR: VMI Publishers, 2010.

Hodges, Zane. *Jesus, God’s Prophet.* Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2018.

Sermon Two • “Severe Turbulence Diverted (for Believers)”

Dr. John Hart has been a professor at Moody Bible Institute for over 30 years. He holds a Th.M. degree from Dallas Theological Seminary and a Th.D. from Grace Theological Seminary. He is a contributing author to The Moody Bible Commentary, providing the commentaries on the Gospel of John and the Epistle of James.

The recommended resource for Sermon #2 is his detailed analysis of Matthew 24:36-44. John is the General Editor of the book *Evidence for the Rapture* in which he authored Chapter 2 entitled “Jesus and the Rapture: Matthew 24.”

Hart, John F., ed. *Evidence for The Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism.* Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015.

Sermon Three • “The First and Foremost”

Dr. Charlie Bing is no stranger to Fellowship Bible Church, having spoken at FBC on more than one occasion. Charlie is the founder of Grace Life Ministries, a ministry devoted to the training of national and international Christian leaders in the theology of grace, both as it relates to justification and sanctification. Charlie received both his Th.M. and Th.D. degrees from Dallas Theological Seminary and has authored several helpful discipleship tools.

The recommended resource for Sermon #3 is from pp. 97-108 in his book **Grace Salvation & Discipleship** where Charlie addresses the parable of the evil servant of Matthew 24.

Bing, Charles C. *Grace: Salvation & Discipleship*. Grace Theology Press, 2015.

Sermon Four • “The Ten Virgins and The Fitness Report”

Following his graduation from the University of Northern Iowa, John Claeys received his Th.M. degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. He is the author of two books on eschatology, **The Coming Apocalypse** and **A New World Coming**. He has served in pastorates and also as professor of biblical studies at LeTourneau University. John is a personal friend of some of our pastoral staff and presently resides in Tyler, Texas.

The recommended resource for Sermon #4 comes from **The Coming Apocalypse**, chapter 17, “The Ten Virgins.”

Claeys, John. *The Coming Apocalypse: The Ticking of the End Time Clock*. Sisters, OR: VMI Publishers, 2010.

Sermon Five • “Living Before the Audience of One”

Dr. Joe Wall has served pastorates in Texas as well as the president of Colorado Christian College. He assisted the founding of The Grace School of Theology in the Houston area. He has authored several books and co-authored with Gene Getz and is associated with the theological society the Free Grace Alliance.

The recommended resource for Sermon #5 comes from Dr. Wall’s book, **Going For The Gold** where he addresses the parable of the talents. It is

recommended to especially focus on Chapters 8, 9, and 11 in reference to Sermon #5.

Wall, Joe L. *Going For The Gold: Reward and Loss At The Judgment Of Believers*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991.

Sermon Six • “At The End of the Day”

Dr. Joseph Dillow received both his Th.M. and Th.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary. He served as director of Campus Crusade ministries at Southern Methodist University and Cornell University and later founded a ministry to church leaders behind the Iron Curtain before its collapse. He also served as a visiting professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

The recommended resource for Sermon #6 and the parable of the Sheep and the Goats comes from Dillow’s comprehensive work ***Final Destiny***, Chapter 53.

Dillow, Joseph C. *Final Destiny*. Monument, CO: Panym Group, Inc., 2012.



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