

(1) The Olivet Discourse

Context of the Discourse

Matthew presents the Lord Jesus as King. His gospel begins, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (1.1). He is ‘son of David’ first, and as such, heir to the *throne*. He is ‘son of Abraham’ second, and therefore heir to the *land* and *promises* of God. Matthew’s gospel can be summarised as follows:

Scripture	Title	Notes
Matthew 1-4	<i>Pedigree</i> of the King (1.1-17) <i>Prophecies</i> fulfilled in the King <i>Proving</i> of the King (4.1-11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Three</i> cycles of <i>fourteen</i> generations. • <i>Seven</i> prophecies fulfilled (1.22-23; 2.5-6, 15, 17-18, 23; 3.3; 4.14-16).
Matthew 5-7	<i>Principles</i> of the King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sermon on the Mount. The spiritual character and conduct expected of His subjects.
Matthew 8-9	<i>Power</i> of the King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ten</i> miracles in <i>three</i> cycles (three-three-four). Note the variety including leprosy, fever, demon possession, nature (storm), death, those who were blind and dumb.
Matthew 10-12	<i>Presentation</i> of the King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciples sent out to preach, ‘the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (10.7). The appeal of Christ (11.28). • Three responses to Christ: <i>doubters</i> (11.3), <i>disinterested</i> (11.17) and <i>defiant</i> (11.21). • Christ is rejected (12.14). He withdraws Himself from Jerusalem all the way to the border of the land in <i>Caesarea Philippi</i> (12.15; 16.13).
Matthew 13	<i>Parables</i> of the King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The King is rejected. The <i>mysteries</i> of the kingdom are therefore revealed.
Matthew 14-18	<i>Purpose</i> of the King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revelation of the <i>Christ</i>, the <i>church</i>, and the <i>cross</i> (16.16-21). A purpose not formerly revealed. • Note the church of the <i>dispensation</i> (16.18) and church of the <i>district</i> (18.20).
Matthew 19-23	<i>Programme</i> of the King <i>Praise</i> of the King (21.16) <i>Person</i> of the King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betrayal, death and resurrection (20.17-19). • The <i>regeneration</i> and ‘throne of His glory’ (19.28). Parables of the <i>wicked husbandmen</i> (21.33-46) and <i>king’s marriage supper</i> (22.1-14). ‘Blessed is He that cometh’ (23.39). • Though rejected He is still characterised by <i>mercy</i> (20.31), <i>compassion</i> (20.34; 23.37), <i>authority</i> and <i>wisdom</i> (22.15-46).
Matthew 24-25	<i>Prophecies</i> of the King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two questions are asked by the disciples (24.3). 1. When shall these things be? Answered principally by Luke. 2. What shall be the sign of thy <i>coming</i>, i.e. the <i>end of the age</i>.
Matthew 26-27	<i>Passion</i> of the King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His worship (26.6-13), betrayal (26.14-56; 27.3-10), <i>Jewish</i> trial (26.57-68), denial (26.69-75), <i>Roman</i> trial (27.1-2, 11-26) and death (27.27-66).
Matthew 28	<i>Proclamation</i> of the King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As alive from the dead, ‘all authority’ is His. Hence the commission to ‘make disciples of all nations’ (28.19-20).

With the King having been rejected by the *leaders* and *people* of Israel, nothing remains but the certain and fearful judgment of God. The final words of the Lord’s public ministry are found in 23.1-39 where *seven* (eight in TR) woes are prescribed upon the scribes and Pharisees. They had led the nation in their rejection of the Messiah.

Condemnation of the Saviour [Matt. 23.37-39]

v.37: In the spirit of Jeremiah (13.17) the Lord had wept over the city of Jerusalem two days earlier (Luke 19.41-42). Here, the repetition of Jerusalem suggests intense emotion and concern (cf. Luke 10.41; 22.31). The city stands as representative of the attitude of the entire nation, especially its religious leaders, who were *continuing* (present active participles) to *kill* and *stone* the prophets, the awful culmination being the crucifixion of Christ in a mere three days’ time. Stoning was the penalty for the worst crimes in Israel, including false prophecy. This was the way the nation had treated God’s servants, not least the Son of God himself. Yet, during the earthly ministry of Christ, he had longed to

gather and shelter his people from impending judgment, as a hen would her chicks. The rabbis used the figure of a bird's wings to describe the divine shelter afforded the nation by the Shekinah glory – the dwelling presence of God in their midst. That glory had sadly departed (Ezekiel 10.18-19; 11.22-23) resulting in Israel's captivity. Now that glory had once again appeared in the person of Christ, but they 'would not' receive Him. Scripture does not teach determinism. They freely chose to resist the grace of God. **v.38**: The consequence was severe. Their 'house' was therefore 'forsaken' (abandoned) for the glory (and blessing) of God (in the person of Christ) was departing from it (24.1). The 'house' in view is likely the temple (cf. 21.13), which in turn represents the 'house of Israel' (10.6; 15.24). Such *spiritual* desolation would ultimately result in *physical* destruction in AD70 (24.2). **v.39**: The nation would 'never' see or hear Christ in the temple again – He was departing to the Father by way of the cross. But note the word 'until'! Christ's rejection of Israel is not full and final (Romans 11.1). He will come again to a repentant nation at his second coming. Then the cry, in truth and sincerity (unlike the triumphal entry), will be 'blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord' (Psalm 118.26). They were words that all Jews associated with the acclamation of Messiah when he came to establish His kingdom. Then Israel will no longer be *forsaken* and *desolate* (Isaiah 62.4). Between the Lord's abandonment of Israel's house and the glad day of His return there will be an interval of time. **Two conditions will characterize this interval. 1. The King will be absent. 2. The desolations will continue without relief until He returns.**

Key Components of the Synoptic Accounts

- The discourse is recorded in each of the synoptic gospels, each with a different emphasis. Cf. Mark 13; Luke 21.5-36.
- The disciples stand unique as those who were linked with the nation of Israel (they were Jews) *and* foundational members of the church (apostles). In Matthew 24-25, they are viewed as representatives of the believing remnant as those having *received* the Messiah. Thus, He reveals the future to this small company of faithful witnesses. However, in the upper room ministry of John's gospel, the disciples are viewed as representatives of the church. Hence a clear reference to the *rapture* rather than the manifestation (John 14.1-3), and the emphasis on the coming Holy Spirit who would 'guide' them 'into all truth' (16.13). We are therefore not expecting to find the church in Matthew 24-25! *WW Fereday: It is plain that the Twelve had not the church in mind at all just then. They were Jews, with minds full of earthly hopes and prospects, founded upon the prophecies of OT. They firmly believed Jesus to be Israel's Messiah, and they counted on Him to remove all difficulties out of the way and set up His throne in Zion.*
- The Olivet Discourse has spawned a huge variety of interpretations amongst commentators. The most prevalent error is propagated by *Amillennialists* (no literal millennium). They believe the entire prophecy was fulfilled in the *past*, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and coming of Christ in AD70. This cannot be. For example, when did the nation welcome Christ in AD70 (23.39)? The gospel has not yet been proclaimed worldwide (24.14). The 'abomination of desolation' in the form of a man claiming deity in the temple of God has not occurred. As horrific as the events of AD70 were, they cannot be described in the terms of 24.21. And when did 24.29-30 take place?!
- Though Luke undoubtedly refers to *some* events of AD70, *all* of the prophecies in Matthew and Mark deal with events transpiring *after* the rapture. This is expected as the *two* questions of the disciples refer to two separate historical events divided by nearly 2000 years! In His answer to the *first* question, concerning the time of the *destruction* of the temple, the Lord speaks of the *desolation* of Jerusalem and *dispersion* of the nation. Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles until the *times of the Gentiles* would be fulfilled (Luke 21.20-24).
- Luke's language of these verses is quite unique, and not to be found in Matthew or Mark. The imperative to 'flee to the mountains' (Luke 21.21) was wonderfully heeded by Jewish believers. *"In the year AD 66, the first Jewish revolt broke out against the Romans. When the revolt first began, the Roman general in the Land, Cestus Gallus, came with his armies from Caesarea and surrounded Jerusalem. The surrounding of the city marked the sign that Jesus had promised, and the Jewish believers knew that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed. Jesus had commanded the Jewish believers to desert the city when they saw this happening. However, it was impossible to do so while the Romans were surrounding the city. Then Cestus Gallus noticed that he did not have enough supplies to maintain an extended siege, so he lifted the siege of Jerusalem in order to go back to Caesarea. On the way, he was attacked by Jewish forces and killed. Temporarily, the city was no longer surrounded by the armies, so every single Jewish believer was able to leave Jerusalem. They crossed the Jordan River and set up a new community of Jewish believers in the town of Pella in the Transjordan. They were joined by Jewish believers from Judea, Galilee, and the Golan. There they waited for the prophecy of Jesus to be fulfilled. In the year AD 68, a new Roman general by the name of Vespasian and his son, Titus, again besieged the city, and in the year AD 70, the city and the Temple were destroyed. Altogether, 1,100,000 Jews were killed in this final onslaught, but not one Jewish believer died because they obeyed the words of their Messiah."* Extracted from Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "Footsteps of the Messiah".
- Two different temples are in view in the Discourse. The *first* temple (Herod's Temple) was completely **destroyed** (24.2; Luke 21.6) as a divine judgment upon Israel for not receiving the Messiah at His first coming (Luke 19.44). The *second* temple (yet to be built) will be **desecrated** (24.15). This will be a sign for Jews to escape Jerusalem and expect the imminent coming of Messiah (24.29, 34).