

The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Coming of the Son: Evangelical Interpretations of the Olivet Discourse in Luke

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The Olivet Discourse stands as one of the most important and exegetically perplexing portions of Jesus' teachings. All of the Synoptic Gospel writers recount a discourse during Jesus' final days in Jerusalem where he followed the prophetic lineage of Jeremiah by predicting God's judgment upon the temple and unrepentant Israel.¹ Indeed this was an emotionally charged statement in the ears of his disciples. They were possibly troubled, definitely bewildered, but at the same time intrigued. And Jesus' response to their question about the timeline of his prophecy has left biblical

scholarship with a theological minefield of questions. Many of them are interconnected, simply being different strands of one larger interpretive web. Yet at the risk of being reductionistic, it is possible to compile them into four categories.²

First, the documentary background for the Olivet Discourse demands attention. At this level,

we research to discover which Gospel writer may have depended upon the other(s) and/or whether outside sources were used.³ Reasons for these concerns include the fact that Mark's account appears to be more straightforward while Matthew retains some significant variances including a longer section on his parabolic warnings to his disciples to be ready for his return.⁴ Also while Luke is more detailed about Jesus' descriptions of the temple's fate, many of his comments, which Matthew and Mark mention, are omitted in Luke's version but are alluded to earlier in his Gospel (e.g., Luke 13:35; 17:20-37; 19:42-44).

Second, its linguistic structure and literary style are subject to scrutiny. Here one must examine the individual presentations intrinsic to each Gospel as well as discern how each one harmonizes to encapsulate the whole scope of the Olivet Discourse. These endeavors must consider the literary nature of prophetic discourse, especially regarding numerous Old Testament allusions and difficult apocalyptic imagery.⁵

Third, several major referents require careful

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attention. For example, what or who exactly is the abomination of desolation? Is it (he) simply Titus and his armies which at first glance would seem to be the case, or is it referring to an eschatological figure—or both? Also how should the concept of the Tribulation or the imagery of the Son of Man be understood? Are they prophetic metaphors alluding only to God judging Jerusalem, or are they cosmic language describing events that literally affect the natural realm at the end of time?⁶

Fourth, there is the difficult task of deciphering a chronology of events. At first glance, a *prima facie* reading shows that Jesus elaborates upon his prediction about the temple. But do his subsequent comments about returning as the Son of Man refer to a first-century event or an end of time finale? This is difficult exegetically speaking because while Jesus claims that his predictions will be fulfilled within the time frame of the present generation (Matt 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32), he also states that no one knows the hour of his return (Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32). So somehow, either the Olivet Discourse is only referring to Jerusalem's fate or it must be transposing predictions of events that end history over a description of first-century events within history.⁷

Recognizing, then, that these challenges continue to elicit discussion among evangelical scholars, this essay will hope to achieve three modest objectives: (1) to summarize briefly a basic outline of the Olivet Discourse in Luke's Gospel; (2) to provide a survey of interpretive options that evangelicals typically consider when engaging the meaning of the Olivet Discourse—namely, dispensational futurism, proleptic futurism, and preterism; and (3) to mention a few observations about the general continuity of the Olivet Discourse in Luke.

SURVEYING LUKE'S VERSION OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

In each of the Synoptics Gospels, Jesus' prediction about the temple is a crescendo moment. Matthew highlights its importance by first documenting Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees (Matt

23:1-36) and his lament over Jerusalem's unrepentant condition (Matt 23:37-24:2). Similarly Mark emphasizes the mounting tensions between the Jerusalem leaders and Jesus to the extent that some scholars think his Gospel presents the strongest case for Jesus replacing the temple.⁸ As for Luke, while there is debate about how his view of the temple coincides with the other Synoptics, it does supply unique contours to the overall flow of his Gospel.⁹ The temple is the place where Gabriel announced the birth of John, Jesus' forerunner (Luke 1:9, 21-22); Simeon praised the Lord at Jesus' circumcision (Luke 2:27); and where Jesus as a child was found talking to Jerusalem's teachers (2:46). The temple was a historical marker of Israel's heritage (11:51); it was the central place of worship where Jesus confronted apostate Israel (19:45) and offered the message of his kingdom to the outcasts (19:47-20:1). Yet now in the Olivet Discourse, it is the target of judgment along with Jerusalem and its destruction is somehow indicative of the Son of Man whose coming will bring distress to all the nations (21:25).

Luke begins the Olivet Discourse differently than Matthew and Mark. They claim that Jesus made his prediction as he was leaving the temple and then the disciples, specifically Peter, James, and John asked for further elaboration when they reached the Mount of Olives (cf., Matt 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-3). Luke, on the other hand, keeps the audience unspecified and does not locate Jesus at the Mount of Olives *per se*. Possibly he is delineating between the crowd in general (Luke 21:5), and the disciples, who were the main recipients of Jesus' comments (Cf., Luke 20:45; 21:6). Or perhaps Luke is simply abbreviating the details of Jesus' locale.¹⁰ In any case, Jesus' declaration elicits questions about the timing of fulfillment. Here Luke is very similar to Mark in that Jesus seems to be questioned only about the time of Jerusalem's fall and what sign will precede it. However their use of the phrase "these things" (Mark 13:3; Luke 21:7) combined with Matthew's rendition show that the thought of the temple's end was linked to

deeper concerns about the end of the age and final restoration (Matt 24:3). So the explicit message of judgment against Jerusalem cannot be divorced from the underlying expectation that the nations will be as well.

After the fulfillment question, Luke structures his account accordingly. He begins, like Matthew and Mark, with references to impending turmoil that will be created by false teachers, social upheaval, and natural disasters (Cf., Matt 24:4-6; Mark 13:5-8; Luke 21:8-11). What is distinct is that while Matthew and Mark categorize these events as merely birth pangs, which lead to fulfillment of Jesus' Jerusalem prediction, Luke does not. Instead he inserts, "before all these things" (21:12) before the next section about persecution. In 21:12, Luke states that "before all these things," (i.e., birth pangs), there will be immediate persecution for the disciples to face. The description here reflects the basic content of Matthew and Mark though Luke omits the comments about the gospel being preached to all the nations (See Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10 and cf., Luke 21:13-19). Subsequently, Luke records Jesus' commentary on the destruction of Jerusalem which is very specific. While Matthew and Mark quote Jesus' reference to Daniel's prophecy about the Abomination of Desolation, Luke records Jesus' interpretation of the quotation as referring to Jerusalem being surrounded and desolated by the soon invading armies (Cf., Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20). Also, Luke describes Jerusalem's judgment as being indicative of the "days of vengeance" (Luke 21:22) which normally is an Old Testament phrase indicating punishment for covenantal unfaithfulness.¹¹ And coupled with this point, Luke mentions that Jesus says this time of judgment occurs during the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24), which at the very least indicates that this time will end with something else to follow.

The final segment of Luke's recounting follows in the footsteps of many Old Testament prophets who would describe upcoming events without explicit reference to the time the events would

take place. On the heels of describing the horrors to befall Jerusalem, Luke abruptly transitions to Jesus' references to the coming of the Son of Man in a shorter form than Matthew and Mark (Cf., Matt 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28). Part of the reason for this is that Luke records some of these omissions in an earlier discourse (e.g., Matt 24:25-28; Luke 17:20-37). After summarizing the apocalyptic imagery that is intrinsic to the Son of Man prophecy in Daniel, Luke concludes the account with Jesus' use of the fig tree illustration to teach his disciples about eschatological discernment (21:29-31); Jesus' admonition that all these things would take place within "this generation" (21:32) as well as his promise that his claims would outlast heaven and earth (21:33); and finally a concise summary of his exhortations to his disciples to be ready for the coming troubles and stand before him on the last day (21:34-36). At this juncture, however, the questions that remain are how Luke's record should be interpreted. And this leads to our next section on surveying interpretive options that evangelicals propose for reading the Olivet Discourse.

DISPENSATIONAL FUTURISM & THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

To begin, many evangelicals believe that most of Jesus' claims in the Olivet Discourse will transpire in the future at the end of history. The reason being that they focus mainly upon a period of time known as the Great Tribulation which will take place just prior to Jesus' return to establish his earthly kingdom. So the Olivet Discourse initially recaps Jesus' prediction about Jerusalem's temple, which was fulfilled in the first century, and then projects to the eschatological future by describing a severe time of tribulation that culminates with the *parousia*. Today this reading is most commonly advocated by believers who embrace some form of *dispensationalism*. Historically this tradition has had tremendous influence in many conservative Christian circles.¹² In recent decades, though, it has encountered significant divergences between more traditional dis-

pensionalists and those who are labeled today as progressive dispensationalists.¹³

But despite these variances, there are some common aspects intrinsic to all shades of dispensational futurism. The first and most important factor is that in the outworking of biblical dispensations, or epochs of time in redemptive history, God has established a covenantal relationship with the people of Israel that sets the trajectory for how history will unfold. Specifically when Israel became the chosen conduit through whom the Messiah would come, part of the net result was that the nation was promised an eschatological future as a divinely restored people.¹⁴ Then from this commitment comes the derivative idea that the body of Christ, the church, marks a dispensational shift wherein the Old Testament theocracy is nullified and Israel's final restoration now awaits a deferred literal fulfillment. This means that the church marks a new dispensational period and its identity is unique because it is a pneumatically-formed assembly made up of all nations as opposed to the exclusive descendants of Jacob. And while dispensationalists vary on how they nuance this redemptive-historical dynamic, all agree that the church is not a New Covenant version of Israel.¹⁵ Finally dispensationalists believe the return of Christ will transpire in stages that coincide with the dispensational outworking of God's plans for both groups. The first occurs at some unknown point in the future when the church is raptured to heaven prior to the commencement of the Tribulation period. Typically in the pretribulation view the church is exempted from this period because it is a time when God judges the earth and brings Israel to a point of national repentance. Then after the Tribulation, Christ returns to redeem Israel and establish his kingdom over the nations.¹⁶

Now dovetailing with the present topic, dispensationalists interpret the Olivet Discourse within the perceived context of a dispensation where God is dealing with Israel prior to the establishment of the Church. The point is made that when Jesus was questioned about his prophecy, his answers

did not exceed the Jewish horizons of interest. The disciples only had a remote conception of what the church might be. But they were well aware of the theological centrality of the temple in Jerusalem as well as Israel's hope in the coming Messiah. This is why Jesus' comment about the temple was so jarring because it was indicative of the end of the age. Dispensationists contend that to be consistent one must see the Olivet Discourse against the backdrop of these Jewish eschatological expectations.¹⁷

There is difference of opinion, however, as to whether Jesus' comments were only future-oriented or if they somehow described the first-century destruction of the temple in a typological fashion that looked forward to the end of history. The former perspective is advocated by many classical/traditional dispensationalists while the latter view is defended by some traditional and all progressive dispensationalists.¹⁸ That aside, all dispensationalists maintain two features about Jesus' comments. One is his description of the Tribulation events. Including Luke's focus on the Roman armies, Jesus weaves a tapestry of OT imagery referencing the iconic Day of the Lord and the general components of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks wherein a figure is described as betraying Israel and desecrating the temple (Dan 9:24-27).¹⁹ The other common theme is that Jesus' comments are geared toward describing God's judgment upon the earth just prior to his final deliverance of Israel. According to Luke, it will occur when the time of the Gentiles has been completed, which is essentially prophetic code for the church age.²⁰ This means Jesus does not give any information about the rapture because it is a biblical truth to be revealed later after Christ's ascension.²¹ Also Jesus' claim that all of "these things" would happen within "this generation" is interpreted so as to allow for a future fulfillment. Some traditional dispensationalists interpret "this generation" as a reference to the Jewish people as a whole while others opt for seeing it as alluding to the perpetual generation of unbelievers throughout history. Still

others think the phrase refers to the idea that the generation seeing the beginning of the tribulation will also witness the return of Christ.²²

INAUGURATED ESCHATOLOGY & THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

A second approach prominent on the spectrum of evangelical options—which might fairly be called *approaches*, given the number of theological backgrounds represented by the people who hold this view—is what one could call *proleptic futurism*. Though highly diverse and nuanced, those who fit into this category affirm some version of inaugurated eschatology.²³ As a theological idea, the term eschatology (i.e., doctrine of things to come) is combined with the idea of inauguration, which essentially refers to an act of ceremonial observance whereby a given party inducts another newly designated party into a position of authority. The purpose for merging these terms is to highlight a perceived tension in the New Testament between the temporary co-existence of two mutually exclusive realms. There is the present age marked by all the consequences of sin and the establishment (or inauguration) of another by Jesus Christ through his redemptive work. Upon his ascension as the victorious king, the present age is now on a divinely-set stopwatch ticking down the last days until the kingdom of God arrives in its consummate form on the last Day when Christ returns. In the meantime, the ages clash because sin and death still exist though the signs of their demise permeate history through the existence of God’s redeemed people. One could say that Christ’s first coming to atone for sin and defeat death is a proleptic act that currently displays the power he has to one day raise the dead and execute divine justice.²⁴

As it pertains to the Olivet Discourse, advocates of this model propose diverse theories. The main reason for this is that there are so many theological traditions that implement it. For instance, there are progressive dispensationalists, historic premillennialists, amillennialists, postmillennialists, and

many other biblical scholars who are convinced that inaugurated eschatology solidifies their readings of Scripture. The problem is that these positions can be antithetical to one another, especially when it comes to certain questions about the kingdom of God, the return of Christ, or the millennium. So the diversity of opinions that exists regarding these larger theological categories creates an atmosphere for the perfect exegetical storm when it comes to interpreting the Olivet Discourse.

One way, though, to trace a path through the maze of proposals is to highlight at least three models that are common today. First there are a growing number of scholars, especially among those entrenched in historical Jesus studies, who contend that the Olivet Discourse is not referring to the return of Christ at all. Rather the thrust of Jesus’ predictions is how the temple’s destruction is the historical benchmark that authenticates Jesus as a trustworthy prophet and Israel’s true Messiah.²⁵ Second, there are others who would concede that much of the Olivet Discourse, especially Luke’s version, is concerned with first-century events. But depending on the commentator, the argument is also made that at some point that there is a topic shift wherein Jesus does allude to the final events surrounding the *parousia*.²⁶ The key area of debate is whether that transition occurs before or after the Son of Man section. Some today argue that the *parousia* is only discussed when Jesus warns the disciples about the vanity of date setting and admonishes them to be prepared for his return.²⁷ The third set of interpreters are those who see the Olivet Discourse as using first-century events to set the prophetic backdrop for describing events that will accumulate throughout the entire age until Christ returns.²⁸ The destruction of Jerusalem is the point of reference that Jesus establishes in the first half of the Olivet Discourse, and it is his “present generation” that will see that event.²⁹ He then moves to describe the increasing intensity of the Messianic woes or as Luke says, the times of the Gentiles, which are marked by persecution and tribulation. Moreover these events come to an eschatological

head with Christ's return.³⁰ It is important to note that advocates of this basic pattern may or may not see a unique time of tribulation immediately preceding Christ's return though even when they do acknowledge a future tribulation period it still does not align with dispensational interpretations of Daniel's seventieth week.

PRETERISM & THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

The third approach to interpreting the Olivet Discourse, championed mainly by postmillennial evangelicals, is *preterism*. Deriving from the Latin words *praeter* (beyond) and *ire* (go), the word denotes the concept of "being in the past" and historically it has been used to describe a specific way of interpreting the book of Revelation.³¹ The idea being that the majority of its visions pointed solely to the events leading up to and culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem. So while the vast majority of John's Apocalypse provided descriptions of impending events that would transpire in the immediate future of the first-century church, they are now ancient remnants of our past. This way of understanding Revelation is essentially how preterists also interpret the Olivet Discourse.³² Like Revelation, the Olivet Discourse records the end of Judaism's role in redemptive history, not the end of human history as a whole. That being said, while there is a general consensus on how the elements of the Olivet Discourse only referred to the temple's destruction, there is sharp disagreement within preterist camps as to whether any New Testament prophecies beyond the Olivet Discourse await fulfillment in the future at all. To clarify these differences, the basic preterist outline for interpreting the Olivet Discourse will be surveyed first and then a brief discussion will be provided regarding the impasse between those who consider themselves to be classical/traditional/partial preterists and those who are known as full preterists.³³

Regarding preterist readings of the Olivet Discourse, a well established scholar to act as a

point of reference is Ken Gentry. He argues that Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse is critical because, of the three Gospel accounts, Luke's account appears to be the most explicit in limiting Jesus' predictions to the first century. When comparing Luke's version to the other Synoptics, Gentry views the basic components of the Olivet Discourse in the following way.³⁴ When Jesus is asked to clarify his initial comment about the temple's demise and what sign would precede it (Luke 21:7), Gentry contends that Jesus' description of the time of tribulation alludes to ongoing moments of strife leading up to A.D. 70.³⁵

Up to this point, Luke's rendition seemingly falls in place with Gentry's view quite well. But by his own admission, the following section regarding the Son of Man (Luke 21:20-36) does present a challenge because it uses cosmic imagery inherent within Daniel's prophecy (Dan 7:13-14) that seems to supersede a first-century timetable. Gentry's strategy for escaping the horns of this dilemma is to argue that actually futurists have the larger problem because of the standard preterist observation that Jesus claims his predictions would come to pass within the generation to whom he is speaking (Luke 21:32). This is why Jesus admonishes his disciples to be ready for his return because it was about to take place (Luke 21:30-32, 36). And regardless of which Gospel is being surveyed, Gentry asserts that the only acceptable way to interpret Jesus' use of the term "generation" is with reference to the present generation of Jews with whom he interacted (Cf., Luke 7:31; 9:41; 11:29-32, 50-51; 17:25).³⁶

So if all of the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the first-century, then to what does the Son of Man section of the discourse refer? The catastrophic natural disasters (Luke 21:25) is imagery alluding to the significant change that is about to take place in history.³⁷ Prophets in the OT often embellished with cosmic extremes to highlight the changes in history that were going to take place when a national superpower was judged by God (e.g., Jdg 5:4; Isa 48:13; Jer 31:35; Ezek 32:2-8; Joel

2:1, 10). Combined with this dynamic is Gentry's contention that the description of the Son of Man coming in the clouds (Luke 21:26) is Jesus' way of interpreting Daniel's vision to mean that when Jerusalem is destroyed, all will see that though he was rejected by apostate Israelites, he is now the risen Lord who is empowered to symbolically ride the clouds of judgment against them and vindicate his church as his new covenant people.³⁸

Notwithstanding these interpretive techniques, preterists like Gentry can be loosely identified as *partial* preterists.³⁹ The reason the adjective "partial" is used is because those who adopt it affirm that there are certain events which did not occur in the first century such as the bodily return of Christ, a final resurrection of all the dead, a final judgment of all humanity, and an eternal state that includes eternal judgment for the wicked and a new creation for God's people. They concede that while the Olivet Discourse does not allude to any of these events, they are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 1:11; 1 Cor 15:20-28; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 2 Thess 1:5-10; Titus 2:13).⁴⁰

In recent years however, preterism has been transformed by the array of preterists identified as full/hyper/radical preterists. These proponents actually consider themselves to be "consistent preterists" and argue that the content of the Olivet Discourse encapsulates all of New Testament eschatology. At face value, this statement would find good company among many futurists and virtually all partial preterists. The decisive break comes in how full preterists implement that deduction. Their basic reasoning is that (1) if all NT teaching about eschatology is only reiterating what Jesus taught in the Olivet Discourse, (2) and if all of the predictions of the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in A.D. 70, then, (3) all New Testament eschatology has been fulfilled. Another way to summarize the view would be this: All of the New Testament teaching about eschatology culminates in the redemptive-historical shift that occurred when the Old Covenant was finally terminated at the moment Christ destroyed the tem-

ple via his providential use of the Roman armies. As the newly resurrected Lord, Christ exerted his authority over death and sin by ending the old code of Judaism and ratifying the supremacy of the New Covenant. Consequently, all believers were spiritually identified with Christ's resurrection and became partakers of the new creation.⁴¹

This more extreme version of preterism gained initial momentum in the last several decades due to the revival of interest in the nineteenth-century work *The Parousia* by James Stuart Russell.⁴² Over time, a sustained proliferation of books, pamphlets, magazines, conferences, and internet websites developed and successfully gained a loyal readership.⁴³ One element somewhat unique to this view is that the majority of work of full preterists is disseminated online rather than through traditional publishers.⁴⁴ And upon looking at their work, one quickly notices that they see the Olivet Discourse much like partial preterists do. The difference being that for full preterists, all other NT discussions about eschatology never speak of anything beyond it. For instance, the resurrection of the body refers to the believer's deliverance from the condemnation of death that the civil authorities of Judaism held over them prior to A.D. 70 and the promise of the new creation became a reality with the dawning of a new age when Christ ascended and exercised his authority over apostate Israel.⁴⁵ The most ironic thing about this view is that they it can foster wholesale unity among partial preterists and futurists—because both groups agree that full preterism is unacceptable biblically.⁴⁶

FINAL THOUGHTS

In retrospect, after surveying the landscape of interpretive options that evangelicals consider viable, I remain convinced that an eclectic approach is optimal. Therefore I conclude with some select observations that I think piece together Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse, even though they cannot address all the data nor escape the need for fine tuning and further debate.

First, with respect to Luke 21:7-11, when Jesus predicts the initial turmoil caused by social unrest and natural disasters, nothing in the text clearly indicates that they are confined to the first century alone or only the end of history. Matthew and Mark describe them as the birth contractions which initiate the Messianic woes (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8). So while we can say definitively that these events increased before God used a pagan nation to judge Jerusalem, it is plausible to expect that they will continue until the Son of Man returns to judge all nations.

Second, regarding Luke 21:12-24, the addition of a temporal marker at 21:12 (“before all these things”) helps clarify that the initial persecution of the church will begin before the events of verses 7-11. This is possibly inserted as a precursor to the book of Acts, which shows how these predictions unfold. Also when Luke transitions to Jesus’ elaboration about the temple, it is important to take note of the “fulfilled” language. The implication is that Jerusalem’s destruction is planned, not arbitrary. This is why Luke also mentions the “Times of the Gentiles” phrase—because the underlying assumption is that this immediate judgment does not preclude future restoration (Cf., Acts 1:6; Rom 11:24-26).

Third, concerning Luke 21:25-28, despite the current trends, the jury is still out on whether the Son of Man section should be limited to the first century. One reason is that the rest of New Testament speaks of the *parousia* in virtually the same way the Olivet Discourse describes the coming Son of Man—thereby making it exegetically difficult to maintain a difference between the two. Also, the language of the Olivet Discourse reflects not only the tone of Daniel but also other prophets like Isaiah and Zechariah who speak of a theophany where Yahweh appears to gather the nations for final judgment.⁴⁷

Fourth, as to Luke 21:29-36, the last section of Luke’s account is where the interpretive rubber meets the road. Jesus has described the temple’s end as well as his return to judge the nations and

clearly stated they are different events. But he only sets a timetable for one, not both. He taught the disciples that the way they could avoid being rattled when the temple tragedy occurred within their own generation (21:31-33) was if they were always prepared to stand before him when he returned at an unspecified time (21:29-30, 34-36).

Luke’s Olivet Discourse is a challenge to the interpreter, but in the end, I am convinced an eclectic approach is best. As Jesus taught his disciples in the first century, so he teaches us today to be ready for his return and to stand in the midst of the trials and difficulties as we await the coming of the King.

ENDNOTES

¹It is ironic that Josephus saw the destruction of Herod’s temple in A.D. 70 as occurring on the same day that the Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s temple. Cf., Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book 6 and John Nolland’s comment in *Luke: 18:35-24:53* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 988.

²Probably the best overview of the major complexities intrinsic to the Olivet Discourse is provided by D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 8* (ed., Frank Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 488-95.

³See discussion in Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: X-XXIV* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1323-33.

⁴Though some of these works are dated now, several of the best individual treatments of the Olivet Discourse that include helpful observations about the differences between the synoptics include Carson, “Matthew,” 488-511; George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993); Nolland, *Luke: 18:35-24:53*, 981-1014; and Darrell Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1650-97.

⁵The use of the word apocalyptic is multilayered in biblical studies, especially as it relates to the Olivet Discourse. There are questions as to whether the New Testament use of apocalyptic is actually indicative of how other sources utilize it, and there is also debate

about whether the Olivet Discourse's use of Old Testament imagery should be categorized as apocalyptic. The literature here continues to grow, and a helpful resource for identifying works related to these concerns can be found in D. Brent Sandy and Daniel M. O'Hare, *Prophecy and Apocalyptic: An Annotated Bibliography* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

⁶Some studies that have summarized the history of research on these topics and explored insightful avenues for further consideration include Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia* (Saint Louis: Concorida Academic, 2000); Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of Exile* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); C. Marvin Pate and Douglas W. Kennard, *Deliverance Now and Not Yet: The New Testament and the Great Tribulation* (Studies in Biblical Literature 54; New York: Peter Lang, 2003); and W. A. Such, *The Abomination of Desolation in the Gospel of Mark* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999).

⁷Many evangelicals believe that the Son of Man section appears to transcend the historical confines of the first century. And it remains difficult to refute this impulse because the basic content of the Olivet Discourse is primary source material for later NT writers who are expecting a visible *parousia*, which includes a literal resurrection and final judgment.

⁸J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 18-32. In a stronger vein, the thesis continues to be presented that the Gospels as well as the rest of the New Testament resounds with Israel's story now being culminated in Jesus as the new temple. See Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010); and G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

⁹Some in biblical scholarship see Mark as having a wholly negative view of the temple whereas Luke has an explicitly positive view. See discussions in Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age*; and James Dawsey, "The Origin of Luke's Positive Perception of the Temple," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18, no. 1 (1991): 5-22.

¹⁰See the comments of Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*,

988; and Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1661.

¹¹Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1678.

¹²For treatments of how radical forms of dispensationalism have contributed to certain versions of Christian subculture, see Paul Boyer, *When Times Shall be No More* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1994); Richard Kyle, *The Last Days are Here Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); and Timothy Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). But pertaining to more mainline dispensational thought that avoids the extremes of Jerusalem fever and apocalyptic sensationalism, see the concise overview and interaction with helpful related sources provided by Craig Blaising in "Dispensationalism; The Search for Definition," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (ed. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 13-34.

¹³Cf., works by traditionalists like Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (rev. ed.; Chicago: Moody, 2007), 161-82; and Ron J. Bigaluke, Jr., *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005); with volumes by progressives such as Blaising and Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*; and Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000). Some of the issues upon which these dispensationalists differ include how prophetic language should be interpreted and whether inaugurated eschatology has any viable role in understanding how dispensations interrelate are ongoing sources of debate. One can see a dialogue about such matters in Henry W. Bateman, IV, ed., *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999).

¹⁴For dispensationalists, this future will include restoration to the promised land, Jesus functioning as the Davidic King of Jerusalem, and there is disagreement whether there will be a restored temple as described in the book of Ezekiel. For some general observations regarding this idea, see Mark Rooker, "Evidence from Ezekiel," in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom* (eds. Donald Campbell and Jeffrey Townsend; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 119-34; John W. Schmitt and

J. Carl Laney. *Messiah's Coming Temple: Ezekiel's Prophetic Vision of the Future Temple* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997); and Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Function of Millennial Sacrifices in Ezekiel's Temple: Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (2010): 40-57; idem., "The Function of Millennial Sacrifices in Ezekiel's Temple: Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (2010): 166-79.

¹⁵The main difference between traditionalists and progressives is that the former group is comfortable with referring to God's plans for two distinct people vs. progressives who focus upon the continuity between the church and Israel as two groups that form one unified people of God. See Blaising's summary of these differences in Craig Blaising, "A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture," in *Three Views of the Rapture* (ed., Alan Hultberg; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 68-72. Also progressives are prone to speak of some preliminary fulfillment of covenant promises to Israel in the current church age of which traditionalists are skeptical. See the interaction between Elliott Johnson and Darrell Bock in Bateman, *Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 121-68.

¹⁶Typically traditional dispensationalists argue that the rapture and the second coming are to be delineated chronologically because it makes the best sense of the multifaceted ways in which Christ's return is described in Scripture and maintains the parallel but not synonymous identities of Israel and the church. A classic example of this perspective can be seen in John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (rev ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979). Progressive dispensationalists on the other hand are a bit more nuanced as can be seen in the work of Craig Blaising. He claims to maintain a pretribulationist view not because of a Church/Israel distinction but rather because of Paul's comments in the Thessalonian letters where the church is promised deliverance from the coming wrath of the Day of the Lord. See Blaising, "Pretribulation Rapture," 71-72. The key, though, is that despite the new progressive clarifications, a Church/Israel distinction is still upheld and continued dichotomy for the Rapture/Second Coming is still advocated. Also during the church age, Israel as a whole has been hardened toward the gospel so that Gentiles can now become a

part of God's household until Christ returns and this hardening be relented (Rom 11:12-36). See an exemplary dispensational discussion by S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Evidence From Romans 9-11," in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom* (ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townshend, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 199-224.

¹⁷Larry D. Pettegrew, "Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13, no. 2 (2002): 179-80.

¹⁸To see the diversity among dispensational treatments, cf. discussions by David L. Turner, "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41," *Grace Theological Journal* 10, no. 1 (1989): 3-27; Thomas Ice, "The Great Tribulation is Future: The New Testament," in *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 96-104; Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53*, 1650-1697; and Craig Blaising, "Pretribulation Rapture," 35-52.

¹⁹For the most part, traditional dispensationalists are the ones who uphold a detailed futurist interpretation of the 70 weeks prophecy and conflate it with Jesus' comments in the Olivet Discourse.

²⁰Ice, "Great Tribulation is Future," *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?*, 100.

²¹Interestingly enough, both traditional and progressive dispensationalists adhere to this basic point. See comments by Stanley Toussaint, "Are the Church and the Rapture in Matthew 24," in *The Return*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 121-136; Bruce Ware, "Is the Church in View in Matthew 24-25," in *Vital Prophetic Issues* (ed. Roy Zuck; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 185-194; and Pettegrew, "Interpretive Flaws..." 173-176. Also to see how a dispensationalist interprets the longer version of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew's Gospel, consult the three part series by Eugene Pond, "The Background and Timing of the Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 201-220; idem., "Who are the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31-46?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 288-301; idem., "Who are the Least of my Brethren?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 436-48.

²²Cf., Pettegrew, "Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Dis-

course,” 186; Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53*, 1688-1692.

²³It must be qualified that progressive dispensationalists affirm the concept of inaugurated eschatology as well. However this label is used to highlight those who are nondispensational futurists.

²⁴For evangelicals, the two most influential thinkers whose work was gradually molded into the forms of inaugurated eschatology that are used today are Oscar Cullman and George Eldon Ladd. See Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time* (rev. ed.; Louisville: John Knox Westminster Press, 1964); and George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

²⁵Cf., the work of N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 459-64; idem., *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 360-65; Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 141-42; and Pitre, *Jesus, The Tribulation, and The End of Exile*, 362-79.

²⁶For vantage points that present this view, see Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days*, 370; Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 207-208; Ben Witherington, *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 179, 283; R.T. France, *Matthew* (New International Commentary of the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); 919-27; and I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 774-77.

²⁷For presentations of this idea, see Alistair I. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen?* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs Series; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 225-227; France, *Matthew*, 936-940; and Gibbs, *Jerusalem and the Parousia*, 207-208.

²⁸One can see versions of this idea in Carson, “Matthew,” 495; Douglas Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” in *Three Views of the Rapture*, 212-23; and Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 994-1007.

²⁹See Carson’s discussion in “Matthew,” 507.

³⁰See C. Marvin Pate’s summary in *What Does the Future Hold?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 75-86.

³¹For the comment on etymology, see Stanley D. Toussaint, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (2004): 469. Also

regarding contemporary preterism, one of the most published evangelical proponents of a traditional preterist interpretation of Revelation is postmillennialist Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. To consult his basic approach, see Kenneth Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (rev. ed.; Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2010); idem., *The Beast of Revelation* (2nd ed.; Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1995); idem., “Postmillennialism,” in *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond* (ed. Darrell Bock; 2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 13-57; and idem., “A Preterist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (ed. C. Marvin Pate; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 35-92. Likewise there are many others who advocate variations of traditional preterism including Gary DeMar, David Chilton, J. Marcellus Kik and R. C. Sproul. Yet one contemporary Reformed thinker who is beginning to make his mark in advocating his own modified views of traditional preterism is Keith Mathison. See Keith Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999); idem., ed., *When Shall These Things Be? A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004); and idem., *From Age to Age: The Unfolding of Biblical Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

³²This is why some preterists argue that while John does not record the Olivet Discourse in his Gospel, he does reference its content in his apocalyptic visions.

³³Some scholars vary in how they label the distinctions between different preterists. Thomas Ice for example once highlighted the classifications of mild, moderate, and extreme preterists. See Thomas Ice and Kenneth Gentry Jr., *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 7. However in observing the literature produced in Reformed preterist circles, it appears that the differences among partial preterists can be so slight that it can be extremely difficult to maintain hard categorical distinctions. Yet there is clearly a legitimate reason to separate them from the extremes advocated by full preterists.

³⁴Most of Gentry’s observations about Luke’s version of the Olivet Discourse are points of overlap from his detailed discussion of Matthew’s version in Ken

Gentry, "The Great Tribulation is Past," in *The Great Tribulation*, 33-66.

³⁵Ibid., 34-43. The warnings about false messiahs, wars, famines, great signs in the heavens (Luke 21:8-11), the prediction about Christian persecution (Luke 21:12-19), and the explicit directions about escaping the upcoming attack on Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24) all began to be fulfilled with the Jewish persecution of Christians (beginning in A.D. 33, Acts 8:1), continued through the chaos caused by Nero (A.D. 64-68) and the Jewish War (A.D. 67-70), and ultimately came to an end with Rome's conquering of Jerusalem.

³⁶Ibid., 65-66.

³⁷Ibid., 55-57.

³⁸Ibid., 60-61. What is interesting is that various scholars who are not necessarily self-proclaimed preterists are adopting new ways to argue for this same basic idea that the Son of Man section of the Olivet Discourse is not a reference to the parousia of Christ to the earth but rather to the establishment of the Christ's new people contra Judaism and the temple. For instance, cf. the work of Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 459-64; idem., *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 360-365; France, *Matthew*, 919-27; and Andrew Perriman, *The Coming of the Son of Man* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 54-64. Also, as an example of a professing preterist who adopts this kind of understanding of Daniel's vision in the Olivet Discourse, see Keith Mathison's comments in "The Eschatological Times Texts of the New Testament," in *When Shall These Things Be?*, 181-82.

³⁹Some preterists are quick to point out that all evangelicals are preterists to some degree because they concede that much of biblical prophecy has been fulfilled, even parts of the Olivet Discourse. But in some ways this is a wrongheaded observation because evangelicals do not necessarily agree that most of the content in the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the first century much less most of the apocalyptic material in Revelation. To say that all evangelicals are partial preterists is like saying that all evangelicals are dispensationalists because no one believes in offering sacrifices in the temple any longer.

⁴⁰It is also important to remember that self-proclaimed partial preterists are typically Reformed and are thereby committed to a minimalist kind of eschatological futurism because of their allegiance to their confessional identities. A good example of this can be seen in the ministry of R. C. Sproul. When his book on eschatology came out fourteen years ago, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker), he strongly advocated a preterist position regarding several key NT passages including the Olivet Discourse. Yet because of his commitment to the Westminster Confession, he was still compelled to hold to the future expectation of classic eschatological events.

⁴¹See the basic arguments made in Samuel Frost, David Green, et al, *House Divided: Bridging the Gap in Reformed Eschatology* (Ramona, CA: Vision, 2009). This book was put together by several full preterists in response a previous anthology that critiqued their positions which was edited by Keith Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be?* Also consult Ward Fenley, *The Second Coming of Jesus Christ Already Happened*. (Sacramento: Kingdom of Sovereign Grace, 1997).

⁴²The book was first published anonymously in 1878 and then under Russell's name in 1887. Note that much of the discussed information about the development of full preterism is referenced from an ETS presentation by Brian Labosier, *Hyper-Preterism: A System Without Hope*, Paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington, D.C., November 16, 2006.

⁴³Some books to consult include those previously noted as well as Kelly Nelson Birks, *The Comings of Christ: A Reformed and Preterist Analogy of the 70th Week of the Prophet Daniel* (Omaha, NE: Xlibris, 2002); John S. Evans, *The Four Kingdoms of Daniel: A Defense of the Roman Sequence with AD 70 Fulfillment* (Longwood, FL: Xulon; 2004); and Samuel M. Frost, *Misplaced Hope: The Origins of First and Second Century Eschatology* (Colorado Springs: Bimillennial, 2002).

⁴⁴As Ed Stevens, who is the President of the *International Preterist Society*, has written, "What the Gutenberg printing press did for the Protestant Reformation, the internet did for the Preterist Reformation." See Ed Steven's Foreword to Russell's *The*

Parousia, which was published by the International Preterist Society in 2003, p. viii. Currently some of the pioneer thinkers producing the most work on this perspective include William Bell, John Bray, David B. Curtis, Todd Dennis, Samuel Frost, David Green, Brian Martin, John Noe, Ed Stevens, and Walt Hibbard.

⁴⁵To see defenses of these ideas, cf., Michael Sullivan, "House Divided: Imminent Redemption in Luke 21:27-28 and Romans 8: 18-23" [cited 14 July 2012]. Online: <http://fullpreterism.com/michaelsullivan/house-divided-imminent-redemption-in-luke-2127-28-and-romans-818-23/>; David Green, "The Resurrection of the Dead," in *House Divided*, 161-217.

⁴⁶Some partial preterists use the word "pantelism" to describe full preterism because they believe "all" New Testament prophecies about the future have been fulfilled. However there is some discussion as to whether some full preterists use this term to refer to a kind of inclusivism or possibly universalism within their theological ranks. See discussion in C. Jonathin Seraiah, *The End of All Things: A Defense of the Future* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1999).

⁴⁷For treatments, see Meredith Kline, "Primal Parousia," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1978): 270-80; and the helpful article by Edward Adams, "The Coming of the Son of Man in Mark's Gospel," *Tyndale Bulletin* 56 (2005): 39-61.