

Are Any Signs of Christ's Coming in Matthew 24:1-31?

Matthew 23:37-24:31

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Introduction

I am privileged to be with you and to teach a portion of our Lord's greatest prophetic discourse, known popularly as the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 23:37 through 24:31. This section of the discourse continues to be interpreted a number of different ways by dispensationalists, especially 24:4-14. The paper is divided into two sections. First, a sketch of various views held by modern dispensationalists, including a critique. Second, a proposed interpretation that is consistent with Matthew's overall argument.

The views of Matt 24:4-31 by modern dispensationalists fall into two categories. First, those that view partial fulfillment during the Church age with the rest fulfilled in the future 70th week of Daniel, known as historical-futurist. Second, those that view a future fulfillment during the 70th week of Daniel, known as strict futurism. The difference between these two basic categories is important since it relates to whether one may interpret events in the church age as signs that Christ's coming is near, especially false Christs, wars, earthquakes, famines and pestilence.

My emphasis is what the biblical text says, not how a current event may or may not appear similar to a text. Proper methodology requires exegesis of the text, then afterward evaluation of a current event to determine if it is the referent of the text. This paper is the result of teaching through the Gospel of Matthew while having discussions with Robert Dean who was also teaching the Gospel concurrently. His paper will follow mine and take up Matthew 24:32-46. We both came to the conviction that the Olivet Discourse relates to Jewish issues asked by

Jewish representatives of the future believing remnant and therefore require a futurist fulfillment only during the 70th week of Daniel.

Before presenting the views held by modern dispensationalists, I want to make mention of some of the men I will quote and am indebted to; Darby, Scofield, Chafer, Gaebelein, Walvoord, McClain, Pentecost, Ryrie, Whitcomb, Toussaint, Fruchtenbaum, etc... These are the men upon whose shoulders I stand. My appreciate far outweighs any differences we may have in our nuanced conclusions. Christ's church is better off with God having used them to promote sound teaching.

Views Held by Modern Dispensationalists¹

In introducing the views held by some modern dispensationalists,² I am not disregarding non-dispensationalists. In fact, it's interesting to study how their interpretations of the discourse are similar to some dispensationalists. For example, covenant theologian and amillennialists Louis Berkhof describes the presence of wars and earthquakes in the present age as characteristic of "...the natural order of events."³ One wonders what the impact of such views has been on dispensationalists who view some or all of these verses as being fulfilled in the Church age. Beyond that brief mention of a non-dispensationalist, my aim is to have an in-house evaluation of the views of traditional dispensationalists who share in principle the same hermeneutic.

Historical-Future Views

Gap View

¹ By the term "modern dispensationalists" I am referring to dispensationalists beginning with Darby. The implication is that dispensationalism was present before Darby. See William C. Watson, *Dispensationalism Before Darby: Seventeenth-Century and Eighteenth-Century English Apocalypticism*, (Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, LLC, 2015).

² Many more views of dispensationalists are considered by Leonardo Costa at <https://i-disp.com/the-fulfillment-of-matthew-244-31-in-dispensational-tradition/>

³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p 703.

Darby considered the discourse to concern the Jews and Jerusalem as the center of the system before God. Verses 4-14 speak of the general condition of the disciples and of the world during the time of the testimony, which is the administration of the gospel of the kingdom in the land of Israel. Therefore, Darby considered verses 4-14 to be fulfilled between AD30 and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, with a gap between verse 14 and 15 for the church age, followed by a resumption of fulfillment taking place in the second half of the 70th week beginning with the abomination of desolation.⁴ In his own words,

The Lord gives the history of the testimony in Israel, and that of the people themselves, from the moment of His departure until His return; but the length of time, during which there should be neither people nor temple nor city, is not specified. It is this which gives importance to the capture of Jerusalem. It is not here spoken of in direct terms—the Lord does not describe it; but it put an end to that order of things to which His discourse applies, and this application is not resumed until Jerusalem and the Jews are again brought forward.⁵

Darby's interpretation is tied to a Jewish presence in the land with Jerusalem as the spotlight. In light of the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 and Jerusalem coming under Jewish control in 1967, we don't know how Darby would have applied the discourse, but it certainly applies to events of the 70th week.

Toussaint interpreted the discourse similar to Darby. Verses 4-6 were fulfilled to the disciples between AD33-70, a gap of time between verses 6 and 7 for the rest of the church age, verses 7-14 will be fulfilled in the first half of the Tribulation, and vv 15-26 will be fulfilled in the second half of the Tribulation.⁶ There is an intercalation in his view as well, similar to Darby.

⁴ Darby, J. N. *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Matthew to John*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008. 168-176.

⁵ "Darby, J. N. *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Matthew to John*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008. 176.

⁶ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1980), 270-78.

The strength of both views is that they both see the discourse as related to Israel only, even when they see partial fulfillment during the Church age until AD70. However, there are also weaknesses. First, there were no “false Christs” between AD30 and AD70. Some have claimed there were, such as Gentry and DeMar, but their suggestions, on closer inspection, reveal they were false prophets. False Christ’s and false prophets are not the same thing. One who claims to be a false Christ is claiming to be the Messiah. Ice said, “We possess no *historical* record of any false Messiahs having appeared *previous to the destruction of Jerusalem*.”⁷ Therefore, it is unlikely that Matthew 24:4-5 were fulfilled between AD30 and 70. Second, Matthew 24:8 says the things in verses 4-8 are “the beginning of birth pangs.” To say that “the birth pangs” begin in verse 7, as Toussaint said, arbitrarily excludes verses 4-5. Why would they not begin with Jesus’ answer in verse 4? And if they do begin in verse 4, as Darby claims, then how can one legitimately begin the birth pangs in the early days of the pregnancy. By definition, birth pangs come at the end of the pregnancy, in the final hours. Third, Matthew 24:34 says “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” While there are arguments *ad infinitum* on the meaning of “this generation” (*η γενεα αυτη*), it is clear from the previous illustration of the fig tree, that the meaning is “the generation that “sees all these things” (cf especially 24:33). They occur within the same season. It is not possible then, to say that some of Matthew 24:4-14 was fulfilled in the 1st century, while the rest will be fulfilled in the 70th week.

Having evaluated the gap view of Darby and Toussaint, John Benson noted that Toussaint changed his view later and claimed that all of 24:4-14 would be fulfilled in the future Tribulation. The handwritten evidence is attached as Exhibit A.⁸

⁷ Thomas Ice, “An Interpretation of Matthew 24-25 (Part 6),” http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-6#_ednref5

⁸ John L. Benson, “Re-Thinking the Mystery Form of the Kingdom” (Bible Baptist School of Theology, 1974).

General and Specific View

Scofield viewed verses 4-14 as a general description of the present church age gathering into an awful intensity at the end of the age.⁹ By the “end of the age” he means the 70th week. He saw the gospel of the kingdom in 24:14 as being preached by the Jewish remnant in the 70th week, “during the great tribulation, and immediately preceding the coming of the King in glory.”¹⁰ Walvoord follows Scofield very closely. He said Matthew 24:4-14 is

...describing the general characteristic of the age leading up to the end, while at the same time recognizing that the prediction of the difficulties, which will characterize the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ, are fulfilled in an intensified form as the age moves on to its conclusion.¹¹

This view, while somewhat vague, does have the strength of seeing 24:14 as being the very end of the great tribulation. However, it has a number of deficiencies. First, it is a double interpretation. Scofield even stated that “Verses 4 to 14 have a double interpretation.”¹² One interpretation of earthquakes is general throughout the Church age, and another interpretation is specific, during the 70th week. This violates sound grammatical-historical hermeneutics. A passage can only have one interpretation. Once multiple interpretations are admitted, there are no controls on the interpreter’s imagination. Second, it states that verses 4-14 are “the beginning of the birth pangs,” and yet if all of vv 4-14 are the birth pangs both in general throughout the Church age and specifically in the tribulation, then isn’t the entire Church age the birth pangs? This is too broad an understanding of “birth pangs.” The OT described the birth pangs as a specific set of pains the world would undergo in connection with the day of the Lord (e.g. Isa 13:8-9), and did not apply them to the natural order of events. Third, as mentioned in the

⁹ C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 1033.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1343.

¹¹ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come, A Commentary on the First Gospel*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1974), 183.

¹² Scofield, 1033.

previous critique, what meaning does Matt 24:34 have once you admit these things are “at least partially fulfilled”¹³ in a general way throughout the Church age? What “generation” will not pass away until all these things take place? A non-contextual interpretation of *η γενεα αυτη*, such as “the nation Israel,” must be adopted to avoid the conclusion that this interpretation will not suffice.

Chronological Historic and Future View

Chafer insisted that Jesus is addressing Israel, not the Church and made clear that the Church is an intercalation in Israel’s 70-week calendar, beginning at the Triumphal Entry. He states that “There is not a thing here ever connected to the Church and to the true Christian that is addressed to them or may be applied to them,”¹⁴ insisting that they knew nothing about the Church at all. 24:4-5 warns Jews not to accept a false Christ. 24:4-8 are events of the Church age leading up to the Tribulation. He stresses that the extent of this time period is unknown and that the Church is raptured in 24:8, though it is not mentioned by Jesus. 24:9 is the beginning of the Tribulation.

Chafer outlined his view around 1947. He thought the rapture could happen very soon because of the movement toward the Modern State of Israel. He may have seen WWI and WWII as well as earthquakes and famines as prophetically significant, but he laid more emphasis on the re-formation of Israel as a state.

Cooper¹⁵ and Fruchtenbaum¹⁶ outline a more detailed version of Chafer’s view. Cooper seems to argue that the false Messiah’s in 24:4-5 would appear to the apostles. This period has

¹³ Walvoord, 183.

¹⁴ Louis S. Chafer, “The Olivet Discourse, Part 1” <http://www.dts.edu/media/play/olivet-discourse-part-one/?audio=true>

¹⁵ David L. Cooper, “The Olivet Discourse” <http://promisestoisrael.org/the-olivet-discourse/>

¹⁶ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 624-632.

already been noted to have not had any false Messiahs historically reported. Fruchtenbaum argues that false Messiahs would appear throughout the Church age and cites several who have appeared, beginning with Bar Kochba in AD132-135. This seems to add legitimacy to the idea that 24:4-5 are being fulfilled throughout the Church age. Further, Cooper and Fruchtenbaum argue that wars and rumors of wars in 24:6 will take place throughout the Church age. These are local wars that are not prophetically significant because they do not herald the end. They interpret 24:7, “nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” as WWI (Cooper and Fruchtenbaum) and WWII (Fruchtenbaum).¹⁷ 24:7 adds “famines” and “earthquakes” to WWI and WWII as the first birth pangs. Therefore, the birth pangs began with WWI and continue to this day. 24:9 is viewed as the beginning of the first half of the Tribulation.

This view has much to commend it. There have been false Messiahs throughout most of the Church age. There have been local wars and rumors of wars. There have been large conflicts, namely WWI and WWII and earthquakes and famines in various places. However, there are also deficiencies to this view. First, the verse 6 “wars and rumors of wars” are said to be local wars distinct from the verse 7 world wars. However, the word “For” in verse 7, is an explanatory *γὰρ*. Verse 7 is clarifying the nature of the “wars and rumors of wars.” They will be wars fought between coalitions of nations.¹⁸ Second, arguments that “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” must refer to WWI and WWII, usually rest on the fact that it is an “idiom” pointing “to a total conflict of the area in view.”¹⁹ The total area in view in the Olivet Discourse is “the whole world.” The conclusion is drawn that the first time such a conflict occurred was WWI. However, historians still argue whether WWI was really the first truly

¹⁷ Cooper was writing before WWII.

¹⁸ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 189ff.

¹⁹ Fruchtenbaum, 94.

global war or whether a war like The Seven Years War or the Napoleonic Wars preceded them, since battles were fought on several continents. It really all hinges on how one defines a world war. If it requires fighting on every continent and every nation, then no war has ever been a world war. If it requires that the war ‘reach’ every continent and every nation, then it’s possible, but this is still under debate. Most agree that the key fronts of WWI were only in Europe and that the fighting was more widespread in WWII. None of these wars were fought on American soil, though they were fought on American seas. The point is that historians still argue over whether WWI and WWII were truly global wars.²⁰ When such questions remain, one should be cautious. Third, the same argument that “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” is an “idiom” pointing “to a total conflict of the area in view” and that the total area in view in the Olivet Discourse is “the whole world,” applies better to the second seal in Rev 6:4 than it does to WWI and WWII. There it is said that to the rider on the red horse “it was granted to take peace from the earth.” This is a truly global conflict which takes place in the first half of the Tribulation.²¹ Accordingly, Cooper was cautious on this point and said, “Here one must be very cautious and avoid dogmatism.”²² Fourth, joined with WWI and II, “earthquakes” from the 20th century are often cited as evidence that we are in the last days. Sometimes it is argued that there is an increase and that the increase will continue. However, the text does not say there will be an increase and the data say there has not been an increase. Biblical creationist and geologist, Steve

²⁰ “Heather Jones, “WWI: Was it really the first world war?” June 29, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-28057198>

²¹ One may try to argue that “earth” (Gk *γη*) should be translated “land,” as a reference to the land of Israel. However, consistency would demand that the peace under the first seal was also only Israel. That may be maintained on the basis of Dan 9:27 peace treaty. However, would one be willing to stay consistent with that into the third and fourth seals? Are these for Israel only? The fourth seal is death of a fourth of the earth’s population. Or is this to just be interpreted as a fourth of the Jews. Such a local interpretation does not seem plausible in light of the fact that this is the seals occur in the first half of the Tribulation, and Israel is under the security of the anti-Christ until the mid-point.

²² <http://promisestoisrael.org/the-olivet-discourse/>

Austin, has shown from the data held by the National Earthquake Information Center that in the 20th century there was an overall slight decrease in earthquake frequency and that during the latter half of the 20th century there was a slight decrease in earthquakes registering 7.0 or greater on the Richter scale, relative to the earlier half of the 20th century.²³ Thus, the last century witnessed an actual decrease in both frequency and intensity. However, the sixth seal in Revelation 6:12-17 mentions “a great earthquake.” It is more likely Jesus’ mention of “earthquakes” in 24:7 is linked to the sixth seal earthquake. When it happens “every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” Fifth, this interpretation begins the birth pangs with WWI. If this is the case the birth pangs have been going on for over 100 years now. In comparison to the last 2,000 years of Church history, 100 years seems too long to fit the birth pangs metaphor.²⁴ Birth pangs are compact and occur with increasing magnitude and less time in between each convulsion. The seals, trumpets and bowls fit this metaphor. Sixth, the illustration from the fig tree in 24:32-34 indicates that the generation that sees these things will see *all* of these things, that is, all the birth pangs that lead to Messiah’s coming. Those who saw WWI did not see all these things. Seventh, this view places the beginning of the first half of the Tribulation in 24:9 where Jesus said, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.” However, this is not a good description of what will happen to Israel at the beginning of the Tribulation. At the beginning of the Tribulation the anti-Christ will enter into league with the nation Israel and provide peace and security for them for the first three and a half years. It is not until the midpoint that Israel will be delivered to

²³ Steven A. Austin, Ph.D. 1998. Twentieth Century Earthquakes – Confronting an Urban Legend. *Acts & Facts*. 27(1).

²⁴ A typical pregnancy is 40 weeks gestation. Even if the birth took 24 hours, which is abnormally long, the ratio of gestation to birth pangs would be 420:1. Compare that with the 20:1 ratio that would be required for the birth pangs to have started with WWI. This example is for perspective only, not for specificity that would lead to any date-setting venture.

tribulation and killed and hated by all nations. Therefore, 24:9 is not the beginning of the first half, but marks the beginning of the second half, and by 24:14 the end has been reached. Thus, 24:9-14 are not a good description of the first half of the Tribulation.

That concludes the historic-futurist views of dispensationalists. These include the gap view of Darby and Toussaint, the general and specific view of Scofield and Walvoord and the chronological historic and future view of Chafer, Cooper and Fruchtenbaum. We now turn to futurist only views.

Futurist Views

Chronological Future 1st Half View

Gaebelein was the first to view the entire discourse as part of the future 70th week. He emphasized that everything in Matthew's gospel is Jewish in character. He held that 24:4-14 is the first half of the Tribulation and connected 24:9 with the fifth seal in Rev 6:9-11. 24:15 begins the second half. It is a strict sequence. He was emphatic that

“If our interpretation is the right one there must be perfect harmony between these three: Old Testament Prophecy: Matthew 24:4-44, and Revelation 6:1-17; Revelation 7:1-17; Revelation 8:1-13; Revelation 9:1-21; Revelation 10:1-11; Revelation 11:1-19; Revelation 12:1-17; Revelation 13:1-18; Revelation 14:1-20; Revelation 15:1-8; Revelation 16:1-21; Revelation 17:1-18; Revelation 18:1-24; Revelation 19:1-21.”²⁵

He was convinced there was perfect harmony between all three. This was a large step in moving away from partial historical fulfillment views to a strict futurist view. He frankly stated that things like wars, earthquakes, pestilence and famine in this present age are only faint shadows of

²⁵ A. C. Gaebelein, “Arno Gaebelein’s Annotated Bible Matthew 24”
<https://www.study-light.org/commentaries/gab/matthew-24.html>

what is to come at the beginning of the 70th week. Variations of his view are followed by McClain,²⁶ Ryrie,²⁷ McClean²⁸ and Bigalke.²⁹

McClean went the farthest in terms of refining this view and there is much to commend. Exegesis shows a strong connection between Matthew 24:4-14 and the seals in Revelation 6:1-17. Such a close connection could not just be incidental. The birth pangs are limited to the 70th week, with the beginning taking place in the first half and the end being more intense until the end of the second half. This fits well with the birth pangs metaphor. However, this view also has some weaknesses. First, adherents link those killed in Matthew 24:9 with the martyrs under the altar under the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9-11. The reason this is a weak link is because Jesus was not talking about martyrs in general in Matthew 24:9, but Jewish believers being martyred. He said, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.” The “you” are the future Jewish remnant being addressed through the believing Jewish disciples. To change the audience by adding Gentile believers in general is not legitimate in the context. The “nations” in the verse who will hate them are Gentile nations. The persecution of Israel will not begin until the midpoint because Satan will not be cast out of heaven to persecute Israel on earth until that time (Rev 12). Therefore, Matthew 24:9 could not be in the first half of the Tribulation but it must be at the midpoint and begin the second half. Second, the first half of the Tribulation cannot end in verse 14 because verse 14 takes us right up to the end. “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Many early expositors including Darby, Scofield,

²⁶ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1959), 362-369.

²⁷ “Verses 4-14 list characteristics of the first half of the tribulation period, whereas verses 15-28 deal with the second half.” Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*. Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1559.

²⁸ John McClean, “Chronology and Sequential Structure of John’s Revelation” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 323-326, 337.

²⁹ Ron J. Bigalke, “A Comparison of the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation.”

Walvoord and Whitcomb recognized that this is the very end of the second half and that it cannot be the end of the first half. Third, as a follow-up argument, if verse 14 is the end of the first half and the first half is not the end, but merely “the beginning of the birth pangs,” then it is apparent that this interpretation is dubious, for if verse 14 was the end of the first half, it would have made more sense to state in verse 14 that this is “the beginning of the birth pangs”. Therefore, while this view is better than the historic-future views, it is still not the best.

Chronological Future 1st and 2nd Half View

Pentecost held that consistency of interpretation required one to not apply any of this portion to the church or the church age. He suggested that 24:4-8 refer to the first half of the 70th week, 24:9-14 to the second half of the week, and 24:15 was a recapitulation indicating the event that begins the second half of the week leading up to the coming of the Son of Man. He said,

There seems to be evidence to support the view that the first half of the week is described in verses 4-8. The parallelism between verses 4-8 and Revelation 6 seems to indicate that the first half of the tribulation is here described. . . . There are indications that verses 9-26 describe the events of the last half of the week. The abomination of desolation (24:15) is clearly stated by Daniel (9:27) to appear in the middle of the week and continue to the end of the period. The word “then” in verse 9 seems to introduce the great persecutions against Israel that were promised them and were described in Revelation 12:12-17, where John reveals that this persecution will last for the last half of the tribulation period (Rev. 12:14).³⁰

This view, or a close version of it is followed by Whitcomb,³¹ Barbieri,³² Showers,³³ Hart,³⁴ and Enns.³⁵ It is my conviction that this view best represents the text. It places all the events within

³⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 1st Grand Rapids printing (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1964), 278-279.

³¹ John C. Whitcomb, interview by author, October 24, 2017.

³² Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 76.

³³ Renald E. Showers, *The Sign of His Coming*, (Bellmawr: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 2016) 9-77.

³⁴ John Hart, *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 48-50.

³⁵ Paul P. Enns, “Olivet Discourse” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 287.

the time frame of the 70th week and avoids speculation about what constitutes fulfillment of prophecy. It also solves the problem of 24:32-34 which seems to indicate by the fig tree illustration, that the generation that sees these things will see *all* these things, thus compacting the events together in a single season.

This concludes the sketches of the futurist dispensational views. These include the chronological future 1st half held by Gaebelin, Ryrie, McClean and others and the chronological 1st and 2nd half held by Pentecost, Barbieri, Showers, others and myself. I will now transition to the second section of my paper, which is a presentation of the case for the chronological 1st and 2nd half in 24:4-14.

The Book Context

The Argument of the Gospel of Matthew

Too often a study of the discourse begins with Matthew 24 rather than the argument of the Gospel of Matthew. When taken apart from the entire argument, one similarity,³⁶ word,³⁷ phrase³⁸ or concept³⁹ can be used to present a seemingly strong case for portions of the discourse

³⁶ E.g. Often the mention of earthquakes in 24:7 is associated with present earthquakes and a rise in earthquake activity in the 20th and 21st century. However, nothing is mentioned in Matt 24:7 about an increase in earthquakes. Furthermore, earthquakes have been occurring at least since the Flood of Noah and the greatest earthquakes known occurred in the distant past. Even the geological data from the USGS during the 20th century shows that the greatest intensity and quantity of earthquakes peaked in the 1940's. Therefore, just because earthquakes are mentioned in the discourse does not mean that they are descriptive of earthquakes we have experienced in the 20th century. Similarity does not mean identity. Context is king. The context is the 70th week of Daniel.

³⁷ E.g. Sometimes *παραλαμβάνεται* in Matt 24:40 and 41 is linked to *παραληψομαι* in John 14:3 to prove that Matt 24:36-41 is Jesus' teaching concerning the rapture rather than the Second Coming. However, there are stronger arguments against such a connection. Use of *παραλαμβάνω* in a positive context, as in John 14:3, should not be imported into Matthew 24:40-41, especially when the context makes clear that those who were taken (*αιρω*) during the flood were unbelievers (Matt 24:39) and the same analogy applies to the coming of the Son of Man with those "taken" (*παραλαμβάνω*). *Αιρω* and *παραλαμβάνω* are clearly being used as synonyms contextually.

³⁸ E.g. Often the *περι δε* in Matt 24:36 is said to refer to a "change of topic" or "slight change of subject matter," on the basis that Paul uses it often that way in 1 Corinthians (e.g. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 25). However, in Matthew's Gospel *περι δε* is used four times (cf 20:6; 22:31; 24:36; 27:46), and not once is it used as a "change of topic" or "slight change of subject matter." To import Paul's meaning is to commit the fallacy of illegitimate totality transfer.

³⁹ E.g. Sometimes the concept of imminence in Matt 24:36 is linked to the rapture, resulting in the conclusion that the verse is about the rapture rather than the Second Coming. However, this contradicts the use of Son of Man as related to the kingdom (Dan 7:13-14) and violates the context of Jesus' words (24:27, 30).

referring to events in the Church age. However, taken inside Matthew's argument these points break down.

While Jesus gave the discourse, Matthew selected the material to include in order to make his argument. Most recognize, even from earliest times, that the book has a particularly Jewish flavor.⁴⁰ Matthew is presenting his argument to Jewish believers. His argument is two-fold; Jesus is the King even though Jesus' kingdom did not come (Matt 1-11). The reason the kingdom did not come is because the kingdom's arrival in history is contingent on Israel's repentance. When Israel rejected the King (Matt 12)⁴¹ the kingdom was postponed and the King began to prepare His disciples for an interadvent age (Matt 13-28). Matthew's Gospel would strengthen the Jewish believer's faith assist in apologetic outreach to unbelieving Jews.

The Five Discourses

In keeping with the argument, the five discourses all relate to the kingdom, not to the Church. The first discourse is Matthew 5-7, the Discourse on Kingdom Righteousness.⁴² In this discourse Jesus explains the kind of righteousness one generation of Israel will need for the kingdom to come.⁴³ The second discourse is Matthew 10, the Discourse on Kingdom Missions. In this discourse Jesus explains the missionary enterprise to Israel whenever the kingdom is at hand.⁴⁴ The third discourse is Matthew 13, the Discourse on Kingdom Postponement. In this

⁴⁰ "Irenaeus says: "Matthew issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews," and "The Gospel of St. Matthew was written for the Jews." Origen says, "St. Matthew wrote for the Hebrew." Eusebius says: "Matthew...delivered his gospel to his countrymen." The complexion and content of the Gospel abundantly confirm this view. Cf Graham Scroggie, *Guide to Gospels*, p. 248. Cited by Toussaint, 18.

⁴¹ This was the informal rejection of the King. The formal rejection would take place later, leading to the crucifixion.

⁴² Known traditionally as *The Sermon on the Mount*, but this tells us only the historical location of the discourse, and little about the content. I prefer to refer to each discourse by its content.

⁴³ It is not a self-righteousness like the Pharisees, garnered through keeping a misinterpretation of the law, but an imputed righteousness that comes only through faith in Messiah.

⁴⁴ The kingdom was "at hand" in the past during the first advent and will be "at hand" again in the future 70th week. This discourse deals with both time periods.

discourse Jesus explains that the kingdom will be postponed and reveals new truths about the characteristics of the age leading up to the kingdom's establishment. He does not teach that the kingdom of the heavens is in mystery form. The meaning of the kingdom of the heavens continues to have the same meaning it did before Matthew 13, that is, the covenanted, prophesied Messianic Kingdom envisioned and hoped for by all the prophets. New truths are being revealed about that kingdom.⁴⁵ Therefore, none of the parables in Matthew 13 reveal the Church. The Church is first revealed in Matt 16:18, which is chronologically after Matthew 13. The fourth discourse is Matthew 18, the Discourse on Kingdom Greatness. Here Jesus explains how a believer living during the postponement can be great in the kingdom to come. The fifth discourse is Matthew 24-25, the Discourse on Kingdom Coming. In this discourse Jesus explains the events that will immediately precede the kingdom's arrival in history and the judgments that will take place when He comes.

The reason for reviewing each of the discourses is to highlight the fact that none of the material Matthew chose to record in the discourses relates directly to the Church⁴⁶ but directly to the kingdom. This is because Matthew's argument is that Jesus is the King, but His kingdom did not come because that generation of Israel failed to have a moral righteousness which blinded them from recognizing Him as their King.⁴⁷ As such the kingdom was postponed until a later generation of Israel repents and brings forth the fruits of repentance. The discourse in Matt 24-25

⁴⁵ See Mike Stallard, "Hermeneutics and Matthew 13, Part II: Exegetical Conclusions", (paper presented at the Conservative Theological Society, Fort Worth, 2001).

⁴⁶ They do relate indirectly. For example, the Church age falls within the age of postponement, but it is not identical to the age of postponement. The postponement is larger, beginning with the national rejection of the Messiah, while the Church began on the day of Pentecost. The Church will end on the day of the pre-trib Rapture, while the postponement will end with Israel's acceptance of the Messiah. So there is a relationship of some of the discourses to the Church, in particular Matthew 13 and Matthew 18, but it is only indirect, as the truths hold for the entire period of postponement, and the Church falls within that period.

⁴⁷ Acts 13:27 says they did not "recognize neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath..." The leaders of Israel were spiritually blind and they led the people into their ignorant state.

describes the conditions in the world that will bring Israel to repentance, issuing in the return of the King and His judgments.

The Context of the Discourse on Kingdom Coming (Matt 23:37-39)

The context for the discourse begins after Jesus' scathing rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. After this rebuke in Matthew 23:37-39 the King laments Israel's rejection saying, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gather's her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"⁴⁸

Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel, including the capital of the kingdom of heaven.

Jerusalem is being personified as the nation Israel. Jesus had come to gather Israel into the kingdom (Matt 10:5-7), but they were not willing. As a consequence of their rejection, their house, the Temple in Jerusalem, would be destroyed.⁴⁹ Furthermore, their King would be absent until they utter the Messianic Greeting of Ps 118:26, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" This provides the immediate setting for the discourse and establishes that the audience of the discourse is the future Jewish remnant being addressed through His believing disciples.⁵⁰

The Disciples' Questions (24:1-3)

In 24:1-3 the disciples came out from the temple and were pointing out the beautiful temple buildings presently under construction according to Herod the Great's design. Jesus remarked in verse 2 that "not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn

⁴⁸ All Scripture citations are from the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update*. La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

⁴⁹ Others have interpreted the "house" as "the house of David" or "Jerusalem." However, the following verses in 24:1-3 make these options unlikely. The disciples point out the Temple buildings and ask Jesus "When will these things be?" Jesus' answer that "not one stone will be left upon another that will not be cast down" shows clearly that the house = the Temple.

⁵⁰ Mark 13:3 shows that only four of the disciples were initially present, "Peter and James and John and Andrew."

down.” This prompted their questions in verse 3, as “He was sitting on the Mount of Olives,” “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

It is often noted that there are two questions here, rather than three, but some see as many as four.⁵¹ The two question view is significant enough to briefly evaluate. Usually the argument is made that two questions are in view because of the two interrogatives, “when” (*ποτε*) and “what” (*τι*). The first being, “Tell us, when will these things happen” and the second, “What *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age.” However, there could just as easily be one “when” question and two “what” questions, making a total of three questions. Other times TSKS construction is noted in the last two questions, combining them into one question so that in the overall there are only two questions. However, a proper understanding of Granville-Sharps rule shows that if there is any relationship, it would be unclear because of the plural impersonal nouns.⁵² Hart’s insistence that there are two questions is a crux in his case for Jesus’ being given more credit for originating the pre-trib rapture in Matt 24:36ff. According to Hart, “...Jesus answers these two questions in reverse order. This technique is called chiasm.”⁵³ In other words, the second question, “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”, is answered first in 24:4-35, and then the first question, “When will these things happen?”, is answered second in 24:36ff.⁵⁴ Hart and others interpret the disciples first question to mean

⁵¹ Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1980), 363.

⁵² TSKS construction is present, but they are impersonal nouns and the relationship is unclear. It could be distinct, overlapping, first a subset of the second, second subset of the first, equality or identity, though identity is rare. It would not be wise to argue from the construction. Cf. Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1996), 270-290.

⁵³ John F. Hart, “Jesus and the Rapture in Matthew 24” in *Evidence for the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), 48.

⁵⁴ His argument is fortified by noting Jesus’ use of *περι δε* in 24:36 as denoting a “change of subject,” cross-referencing Paul’s usages of *περι δε* in 1 Corinthians for support (cf 1 Cor 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). However, *περι δε* does not always have this meaning. In fact, Matthew uses *περι δε* four times and not once does it denote a

“When will the signs of His coming and of the end of the age begin?” or put simply, “When will the day of the Lord begin?”⁵⁵ The day of the Lord is viewed as the entire 70th week. Hart’s answer is that there will be no signs indicating the day of the Lord is going to begin, that it is imminent, and therefore Jesus also introduced an imminent event that will happen simultaneously with the pre-trib rapture. However, the fatal flaw in this line of argument is that he has changed the meaning of the first question the disciples asked. Their questions do not amount to “When will the day of the Lord begin?” but “When will the temple buildings be destroyed?” The temple was the subject Jesus was talking about in Matt 23:38 when He said “your house is being left to you desolate.” The temple is what the disciples were pointing out in 24:1 when they “came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.” The temple is what Jesus prophesied would be torn down in 24:2 when He said “not one stone here will be left upon another.”⁵⁶ Therefore, Hart’s argument that “these things” refer to “the day of the Lord” misconstrues the question. His remaining arguments for the rapture being presented in Matthew 24:36ff completely rest on this misunderstanding of the first question.

As for the first question concerning when the temple buildings would be destroyed, most recognize that Matthew did not record Jesus’ answer in his gospel. Some consider this to be an egregious error, as if something would be awry with the inspiration of Scripture.⁵⁷ However,

“change of subject.” (cf 20:6; 22:31; 24:36; 27:46). To read Paul’s usage into Matthew is an illegitimate totality transfer.

⁵⁵ For example, Hart said, “A key Greek transitional marker in verse 36, “Now concerning” (*peri de*), shifts the focus from the second advent to the events that begin the day of the Lord.” Hart, 46. Proponents often believe that the rapture begins the day of the Lord and occur at the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel. This is the view of dual imminence.

⁵⁶ Sometimes it is objected that they could not have been asking about the Temple, since it is singular, and their question is plural, “when will these things be.” However, the nearest antecedent is the “temple buildings,” which is plural. They are asking when the “temple buildings” would be destroyed.

⁵⁷ Wes Spradley, *Jesus is a Pre-Tribber*, (paper delivered at the Grace Evangelical Society, Fort Worth, January, 2017), 3.

most recognize that the inspired Luke 21:12-24 records a distinct section that has no parallel in Matthew or Mark. McClain explained,

It should be obvious that in this section of Luke's account we have the answer of Christ to the disciples' question about the judgment of Jerusalem and the temple, for here He speaks especially of the events which will occupy the time from His departure to the destruction of the city in A.D. 70.⁵⁸

While this seems clear, some have questioned why Matthew would include the first question without recording the answer.⁵⁹ The reason Matthew recorded the question is because it was connected to the other questions in the disciples' minds. However, the reason Matthew did not record the answer is because Jesus showed it was not connected. The destruction of the temple would happen in the near time frame, as Luke recorded in Luke 21:12-24, while the other events would take place at later time in connection with the coming of the kingdom. Further, to record information about the events leading up to and including AD70 would not contribute to Matthew's argument. Matthew's argument is that the kingdom has been postponed until a future generation of Israel utters the Messianic Greeting. Therefore, Matthew records the questions as the disciples asked them, but he only records the answer to the questions directly related to his argument.

As for the second question, one passage that discusses something that might be considered a sign of His coming is Zechariah 14:6-7, "In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light." Even this is not entirely clear, but it does sound strikingly similar to the luminaries dwindling providing a backdrop for the sign of the Son of Man in the sky (Matt 24:29-30). The disciples use of *παρουσία* was very

⁵⁸ Alva McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 364.

⁵⁹ Toussaint, 268.

definite. It referred to the day He would return to earth to end this present age and usher in the Messianic age. It certainly did not refer to a broader period of time such as “the day of the Lord” or the entire “70th week” as some suggest.⁶⁰ The disciples were thinking in terms of Zechariah 14 and Daniel 9. Their question relates to a precise time that would signal His coming. Daniel predicted this would happen immediately after the 70th week when all Gentile kingdoms would be crushed simultaneously (Dan 2:44-45; 7:12-14; 26-27). Then the Son of Man would come in His kingdom. The use of the title Son of Man is also important in clarifying the discourses relationship to the kingdom (cf 24:27, 30, 36, 37, 39, 44; 25:31). It’s origin as Messianic is Daniel 7:13-14 when the Son of Man is seen receiving an everlasting kingdom from the Father. It is used 86 times of Jesus in the NT, 84 of which are in the gospels with some relationship to the kingdom and the other two view Him in His exaltation, at the right hand of the Father, ready to return to establish the kingdom. The title Son of Man relates entirely to the kingdom. It does not relate to Christ coming for His Church at the rapture or His coming in the broad day of the Lord. Therefore, the disciples question about the sign of His coming is not about the rapture or the coming of the broad day of the Lord, it is about the coming of the Son of Man on the day He returns in His kingdom to sit on David’s throne (cf 25:31). This meaning is consistent throughout the discourse.

The third question concerns “the end of the age” and is related to the second question, the sign of His coming. The Jews thought in terms of two ages, the age leading up to Messiah’s coming and the Messianic age.⁶¹ The end of the age is the end of the age leading up to Messiah’s

⁶⁰ Gaebelein, Frank E., A. Skevington Wood, Homer A. Kent Jr., Curtis Vaughn, Robert L. Thomas, Ralph Earle, D. Edmond Hiebert, and Arthur A. Rupprecht. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*. Vol. 11, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 318.

⁶¹ “In Jewish eschatology two ages were recognized, the first was this present age, the age in which Israel was waiting for the coming of the Messiah; the second was the age to come, the age in which all of Israel’s covenants

coming. Since the age leading up to Messiah's coming ends with Messiah's coming, then the question dovetails with the second question regarding the sign of His coming. Jesus mentions "the end" often (*τελος* in Matt 24:6, 13, 14), as a reference to the day of His Second Coming, confirming that they relate to the same day.⁶²

Therefore, the meaning of the three question, and what the disciples' really wanted to know was, "What is the relationship *in time* between the destruction of the temple buildings and the sign of His coming and the end of the age?" They knew from Zechariah 12-14 that in the last days Jerusalem and Judea would come under attack resulting in a miraculous deliverance by the Messiah, bringing about the end of the age and the beginning of the age of Messiah. How did the destruction of the temple fit into that picture? They probably assumed it would take place at the same time Jerusalem was under attack. As Bruce said, "The questioners took for granted that all three things went together; destruction of the temple, advent of Son of Man, end of the current age."⁶³ Jesus' full answer when harmonized with Luke 21:12-24 shows that they did not all go together, one would occur in the near time frame, and the other in a future time frame. Matthew recorded the answer that related to the future time frame because it supported his argument.

Jesus' Answer (24:4-31)

Having discussed the meaning of the disciples' questions, we now come to Jesus' answer in 24:4. Again, Matthew does not record Jesus' answer to the first question, but it is plainly

would be fulfilled and Israel would enter into her promised blessings as a result of Messiah's coming. The present age would be terminated by the appearance of Messiah, and the coming age would be introduced by His advent." cf Pentecost, 398.

⁶² The disciples asked about the *συντελειας*, the very end. The prefix *συν-* may intensify and therefore relate to Dan 12:13 where Daniel was told that he would "enter into rest and rise again for" his "allotted portion at the end of the age." The last phrase in the LXX is *εις συντελειαν ημερων*, the end day. The prepositional prefix *συν-* emphasizes it is the very end. Daniel was told in 12:11 that the very end day was the 1,335th day. Therefore, the third question may relate to the 1,335th day which is separated from the day of the Second Coming by seventy-five days.

⁶³ Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels" in *The Expositors Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002) 1:289.

recorded in Luke 21:12-24 which was fulfilled between His ascension and AD70.⁶⁴ In verse 4, He begins to answer the second and third questions, the sign of His coming and the end of the age. A central event is found in Matthew 24:15 where Jesus mentioned Daniel the prophet and the abomination of desolation from Daniel 9:27. Thus, the 70th week of Daniel provides the contextual background for His answer.

As mentioned before under the futurist chronological 1st and 2nd half view, the 70th week may be broken down as follows; 24:4-8 refers to some of the events of the first half of the 70th week; 24:9-14 describes some events of the second half of the 70th week when Israel comes under distress all the way to the end; then 24:15 recapitulates and describes the event spoken of by Daniel that will trigger the second half of the 70th week.⁶⁵ Enns said,

In 24:4-8 Jesus describes the signs in the first half of the Tribulation. These are not signs for the church, since the church will be raptured prior to the Tribulation. These signs parallel Revelation 6....In the second half of the Tribulation (vv. 9-14) the suffering will intensify. "Then" (v. 9) marks a transition, referring to the occasion when the Antichrist breaks the covenant with Israel and persecutes the nation (Dan. 9:27)....Matthew 24:15-26 amplifies the period discussed in 24:9-14. In 24:9-14 Jesus foretold many signs; now He singles out one sign—the Abomination of Desolation (v. 15).⁶⁶

The literary style of a sequence followed by recapitulation is a common style of Jewish writing (e.g. Gen 1-2; Ezek 38-39; Rev 6-7). Much of the discourse is land-centered because that is the center of the action, but the effects do often extend to the whole world. By verse 30 the Second Coming will have taken place in the land of Israel and then Jews from outside the land will be gathered by angels for judgment described in later parables (24:45-25:30).

The First Half of the 70th Week (24:4-8)

⁶⁴ John Hart perceives a chiasm of two questions and answers, but he misconstrues the first question to be asking about the beginning of the day of the Lord rather than the destruction of the temple. Therefore, his chiastic approach is imposed on the text.

⁶⁵ Several hold this position. See Barbieri, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Paul Enns, *The Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 287. Renald Showers, *The Sign of His Coming*, 15, 21-27.

⁶⁶ Paul Enns, *The Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 287.

24:4-8 describes some events of first half of the 70th week of Daniel. This is established by seven arguments. First, the verb “deceive” binds these verses with the following verses. The verb “deceive” (Gk. *πλαναω*), is used by Jesus in verses 4, 5, 11 and 24 to reveal the key characteristic of the 70th week. Most dispensational interpreters admit that deception in verses 11 and 24 refer to the tribulation, but some claim that verses 4 and 5 refer to the early church or the entire Church age. However, it is inconsistent to distinguish Jesus’ use of “deception” in vv 4 and 5 of the Church age from the uses in vv 11 and 24 which refer to the Tribulation. Deception is the key characteristic of the entire 70th week included in 24:4-31.

Second, the reference to “false Christs” binds the early verses with the later verses. Jesus refers to false Christs in verses 5, 23 and 24. All dispensational interpreters admit that the false Christs in verses 23 and 24 will come during the Tribulation, but some continue to maintain that the ones in verse 5 came between AD30 and 70 or throughout the Church age. This is inconsistent with Jesus’ usage. During the 70th week many false Christs will appear on the world stage all at one time, heightening the characteristic of deception in the 70th week.

Third, the “wars and rumors of wars” and “nation rising against nation...” in 24:6-7 correspond to the wars in Rev 6:2-4. The “wars and rumors of war” that Israel will be hearing about in v 6 are further explained in v 7 as “nation rising against nation” as indicated by the explanatory *γαρ* (“For). In other words, verse 7 explains that these wars will be fought by coalitions of nations. While this may be explained by WWI and WWII, it is better explained as the wars of the second seal. Many premillennial interpreters have pointed out that the seal judgments parallel Matthew 24:4-8.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ See John McClean in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 322-330. Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, (Chicago, IL; Moody Press, 1992), 416.

Fourth, the “famines and earthquakes” in 24:7 correspond to the famines and earthquakes in Rev 6:8, 12-17. It’s common to hear that these are being fulfilled in the present age and escalating until the 70th week, but it is never stated that they will increase and the earthquake data from the 21st century shows a slight overall decrease in both intensity and frequency of earthquakes.

Fifth, the entire 70th week must be described in 24:4-14. In 24:6 Jesus is careful to note that these wars are “not yet the end,” but in verse 14 it is “the end.” The end is not at the midpoint described in v 15, so v 15 is a recapitulation of the events of the second half. At any rate, because the wars of verses 6 and 7 do not signal the end of the 70th week, but by verse 14 the end of the 70th week will have come, the entirety of the 70th week must be described in 24:4-14.

Sixth, the birth pangs occur in the 70th week, not throughout the church age. In 24:8 Jesus described the events of vv 4-8 as “merely the beginning of birth pangs.” Birth pangs in pregnancy occur right at the end before the baby is born. In the analogy with the coming of Messiah in His kingdom these birth pangs occur during the 70th week and not before. Price said,

...the involuntary and uncontrollable nature of birth pangs, as well as their intensification leading ultimately to a time of deliverance, well pictured the concept of a time of divine judgment that must run its course until the promise of new life could be experienced.”⁶⁸

The birth pangs cannot be stretched across the church age or a period of the church age. They are entirely within the 70th week.

Seventh, these things must all take place in one generation, binding 24:4-8 to 24:9-31. In 24:34 Jesus said that the generation that sees all these things will not will not pass away until they have all taken place. If the things in verses 4-8 occurred pre-AD70 or throughout the

⁶⁸ J. Randall Price, “Old Testament Tribulation Terms” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 71-72.

Church age, such as false Christ's like Bar Kochba (AD132-135) or wars and rumors of wars like WWI and WWII (1914-1918, 1939-1947), then those generations did not see all these things such as the abomination of desolation. Therefore, everything in 24:4-31 must take place within one generation.

In summary, verses 4-8 describe the first half of the 70th week which are the beginning of birth pangs. The verb "deceive" and mention of "false Christ's" throughout the passage bind it into a single time period, the wars and rumors of wars as well as famines and earthquakes occur in this same time period and are paralleled by the seal judgments in the first half of the 70th week.⁶⁹ All this is confirmed by the truth that one generation will see all these things, compacting them into the 70th week.

The Second Half of the 70th Week (24:9-14)

24:9-14 describes events of the second half of the 70th week of Daniel. This is established by six lines of argument. First, in verse 9 the word "Then" (*τοτε*) signifies a transition to things that will take place after "the beginning of birth pangs" (v 8). Some have tried to argue that the things of verse 9 take place simultaneously with the events of verses 4-8, thus placing them in the first half.⁷⁰ However, the word either means, "at that time," emphasizing the immediacy of an event following on the heels of whatever was prior, or "then, thereupon," as simply an event which follows in time.⁷¹ Either way it refers to an event that will follow "the beginning of birth pangs," and not something that occurs simultaneously with them. Therefore,

⁶⁹ See Robert Dean, "The Chronological Relationship of the Three Septet Judgments of the Tribulation to Daniel's Seventy Weeks", <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/chronological-relationship-of-three-septet-judgments-tribulation-to-daniels-seventy-weeks>

⁷⁰ <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-9>

⁷¹ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1012-1013.

verse 9 occurs after the beginning of the birth pangs, and is not a part of the beginning of those pangs. It begins the second half.

Second, the “you” who are delivered over to tribulation and killed and hated by all nations because of Jesus’ name are the believing Jewish remnant. Many argue that this is a description of martyrs in general during the first half of the tribulation, and so a continuation of seal judgments described in verses 4-8, placing it in the first half.⁷² However, this is probably incorrect. The “you” is the future Jewish remnant being addressed through the believing Jewish disciples, not believers in general. To reject this identification is to change Jesus’ audience mid-stream. The mention of being “hated by all nations” should immediately bring to mind the anti-Semitism revealed in Daniel 7:21-22, 25 where we are told that this will go on for “a time, times and half a time” which is explained further in Revelation 12:6, 13, 17; 13:7 as beginning at the mid-point of the 70th week when Satan is cast out of heaven and comes to indwell the anti-Christ (also cf Dan 8:24; 12:1, 7). Thus, Matthew 24:9 is the beginning of the second half of the 70th week.

Third, 24:10 describes division in the nation Israel which will take place in the second half of the tribulation. “At that time (*τοτε*), many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.” The Jewish people will be divided over who is the Messiah. Those who adopt the anti-Christ will betray those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Fourth, 24:11 describes “false prophets” that “will arise” and “mislead many” which is primarily during the second half of the tribulation. Zechariah 13:2-6 spoke about false prophets in the land saying,

“It will come about in that day,” declares the Lord of hosts, “that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land.”³“And if anyone still prophesies, then

⁷² Pre-wrath normally takes this view as the route to get the church into the Matthew 24-25 discourse.

his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you have spoken falsely in the name of the Lord’; and his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies.” (Zech 13:2-3)

This section of Zechariah is describing events of the second half of the tribulation, providing more evidence for Matthew 24:9-14 describing the second half of the tribulation.

Fifth, in 24:12 the period is described as “lawlessness” which corresponds to Daniel 7:25 where the anti-Christ would intend to make “alterations in times and in law,” all related to Israel. This will take place for “a time, times and half a time,” which is the second half of the tribulation. 2 Thess 2:3 also refers to the anti-Christ as “the man of lawlessness,” and this title refers to his actions beginning at the mid-point of the tribulation and not the first half.

Sixth, in 24:13 and 14 Jesus speaks of events right before the end of the 70th week which immediately precede the sign of His coming. The disciples had asked about the sign and the end of the age, Jesus takes them up to the events just before the end in these verses. Verse 13 encourages them to persevere to the end. In the context this is Jewish saints persevering in love during the second half. Because of the lawlessness under the policies of the anti-Christ, love will grow cold among the Jewish people, but the one who endures to the end in love, he will be saved. This is a physical rescue by the Messiah at His Second Coming.⁷³ This also shows that the events of verse 14 are in the second half of the tribulation. 24:14 states that “This gospel of the kingdom” shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” The gospel of the kingdom is preached whenever the kingdom is “at hand,” meaning imminent, on the verge of breaking into history, which makes sense during the second half of the 70th week.⁷⁴ In Revelation 14:6-7 an angel will fly in the atmosphere above earth and preach “an eternal gospel” “to every nation and tribe and tongue and people...” That will occur during the

⁷³ They are believing Jews who persevere so as not to grow cold in their love.

⁷⁴ Not “here” but “near”.

second half of the tribulation. It fits nicely with Matthew 24:14 as further evidence this will occur in the second half just before the end when the sign of the coming of the Son of Man will appear.

Since the entire 70th week has been summarized in 24:4-14 and 24:15 takes place at the midpoint, we know by the word “Therefore” that our Lord is now going to recapitulate the events of the second half beginning with the abomination of desolation. This event triggers the hatred of all nations for the Jews back in verse 9. It is the sign that Jacob’s trouble has come, not the sign of His coming (cf Jer 30:5-7). The backdrop for the sign of His coming is described in 24:29 as a cosmic blackout (cf Zech 14:6-7). The sign is described in 24:30 as something which will appear in the sky, most likely some kind of light (cf Zech 14:6). The sign is probably not the Son of Man because it will appear in the sky before the tribes of the land see Him. The sign itself is not specified, but it is probably the Shechinah Glory, the same sign that signaled His first coming and the cloud that He ascended into at His departure (Acts 1:9-11). The goal of this paper is not to show what that sign is, but that all the events in 24:4-30 occur within the 70th week of Daniel and none occur before it. Therefore, false Christ’s, wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes that we experience today are not signs of His Second Coming. Even these events in the 70th week are not signs of His Second Coming and the end of the age. The only sign is the one stated to be a sign in verse 30, which is left unspecified, but clearly understood by the tribes of the land who mourn when they see it. According to Luke 17:20-24 the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom is likened to lightning flashing out of one part of the sky and shining to the other part of the sky. Until that time they do not mourn, but continue in jubilation (cf 24:38; Rev 18:22-23). Then they will mourn (cf Zech 12:10-15).

Conclusion

This paper has evaluated dispensational views of the Olivet Discourse, primarily where disagreement occurs, in Matthew 24:4-14. These views can be divided into two classes; historical-future and future only. Among the historical-future views, Darby and Toussaint held to a *gap* in these verses, suggesting that the early verses were fulfilled in the first century and the later verses are reserved for the future. Scofield and Walvoord held to a *general and specific* interpretation, suggesting a double interpretation of the verses so that in general these signs occur throughout the church age and will intensify during the tribulation. Chafer, Cooper and Fruchtenbaum held to a *historic-future chronological view* that begins with general characteristics of the age followed by significant signs beginning with WWI and WWII in conjunction with an increase in earthquakes and famines and then the first half of the 70th week beginning in 24:9.

Among the future only schools, Gaebelin, Ryrie and others taught a *future chronological first half view* that suggests verses 4-14 refer exclusively to the first half of the tribulation. Pentecost, Barbieri and others taught a *future chronological first and second half view* that argues that the verses refer to the first and second half of the tribulation. This seems to be the best view in light of the teachings in Daniel, Zechariah and subsequently Revelation.

The second part of the paper emphasizes that the overall argument of Matthew must be kept in mind throughout. All of the discourses relate to the kingdom in some way and the Olivet Discourse relates to the events immediately preceding the coming of the King in His kingdom. Jesus was lamenting the fact that generation of Israel rejected. He pronounced judgment on the temple and announced He would not return until the nation welcomed Him back. The disciples asked about the timing of the destruction of the temple buildings in relation to the sign of His coming and the end of the age. Jesus' answer was that the temple buildings would be destroyed

in the near time frame (Luke 21) and the sign of His coming and end of the age would occur in the far time frame. The far time frame is held together by the verbal use of “deception” and false Christs” throughout the whole passage. The illustration of the fig tree and the statement that the generation that sees all these things will not pass away until all these things take place puts all the events in the same season, which is the 70th week of Daniel. The descriptions of wars, famines and earthquakes are more certainly linked to the events of the first half of the 70th week than they are to events of the 20th century. Therefore, the first half of the 70th week is described in Matthew 24:4-8. These are the beginning of birth pangs. The word “then” in 24:9 transitions to the second half when the nations of the world will hate the Jewish remnant and deliver them to tribulation and death. This will cause division in the nation and false prophets will abound leading many to be deceived. An increase in lawlessness under the policies of the anti-Christ will cause the love of most Jews to grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be rescued. The mention of the end signifies the end of the 70th week. 24:15 recapitulates the second half showing that the the abomination of desolation is the event that will initiate the persecution of the Jewish remnant described earlier in verse 9. The conclusion is that there are no signs in Matthew 24 that describe events in the present Church age that indicate His Second Coming is soon. The events all take place within the 70th week and lead up to the one sign in 24:30 that immediately precedes His Coming and the end of the age (cf also Luke 17:20-24).

Exhibit A: Stanley Toussaint's hand-written quotation marks indicating that Matt 24:4-14 were "Tribulation Period Entirely"

	Sower	Wheat/Tares	Mustard Tree	Leaven	Treasure	Pearl	Dragnet	Matt. 24:4-14	Matt. 25
Darby	Testimony in present age	Removal of church	Profession	Christendom	Church	Church	Gospel net	Course of this age	Christendom
Kelly	Christendom	Rapture of church	Christian profession	Dogmas of Christendom	Church	Church	Spirit's work now	Jewish remnant	Christendom
Gaebelein	God's word in present age	tribulation saints/sinners	Professing Christendom	Apostate church	Israel	Israel	Everlasting gospel in tribulation period	Jewish remnant	Christendom
Scofield	Present age	Christendom	Growth of mystery form of kingdom	Apostate church	Israel	Church	Humanity gathered by gospel	Course of this age-- Christendom	Sphere of profession
Ironside	Christendom	Mixture in Christendom	Christendom	False doctrine in Christendom	Israel	Church	Professing church	Course of this age	Christendom
Chafer	Christian history	Wheat is Body of Christ	Christendom	False doctrine in church	Israel	Church			
Walvoord	Conditions in present age	Entire period of mystery kingdom	Christendom	False doctrine in professing Church, esp. in tribulation	Israel	Church	Tribulation judgments	Course of present age	Remnant of Israel
Ryrie	Profession in present age	Counterfeits in present age	Abnormal growth in present age	Evil doctrines in present age	Israel	Church	Removal of unbelievers	Tribulation period entirely	Remnant of Israel
Pentecost	Church witness	Tribulation Jews	Sphere of profession	Religious corruption in present age	Israel	Church	Tribulation Gentiles	Tribulation period entirely	Remnant of Israel
	<i>S. D. Toussaint: I don't think anyone who speaks in Parables</i>	<i>Saved 1/2 of Israel in Christendom</i>	<i>Profession</i>	<i>Israel (Saved)</i>	<i>Israel (Saved)</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>Ryrie</i>		