

A CHRONOLOGY OF MATTHEW 24:1-44

by

John F. Hart

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Author: John F. Hart
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Advisers: Drs. John Sproule, David Turner, and Gary Meadors

The thesis of this study is to demonstrate the dominant eschatological nature of the prophetic discourse of Matthew 24. The previous context (23:29-24:2) is discovered to contain positive eschatological predictions. From the inception of the Discourse at 24:3, Matthew depicts the future seventieth week of Daniel. In verses 4-14, the entire seven year Tribulation is described in survey fashion. This conclusion is drawn from the use of ὥδ' ("birth pangs," v. 8), and the nature of the catastrophes in verses 5-7. The τότε ("then") of verse 9 is understood as a transition to the second half of the Tribulation, which is completed with the mention of τὸ τέλος ("the end," v. 14).

By the literary device of recapitulation, 24:15-28 returns to the second half of the Tribulation. The abomination of desolation is shown to have reference to the future sacrilegious act of the Antichrist. The use of the terms "those days" (vv. 19,22,29), "great tribulation" (v. 22), and "all flesh" (v. 22) points to a future fulfillment of 15-28. The Parousia mentioned in verses 29-31 is understood in its natural sense of the Second Advent rather than a "coming" of Christ in judgment at the A.D. 70 event. The phrase, "immediately [εὐθέως] after the tribulation," helps establish the eschatological emphasis of the 4-28 unit and eliminates the need for a time gap between verse 28 and verse 29. The design of the fig tree parable (vv. 32-35) is set forth as teaching the nearness of the Lord's return to the signs of the Tribulation. It is posited that "this generation" (v. 34) refers to the generation of the Tribulation period.

Interpretations which view verses 4-35 either as a description of the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem or the interadvent age are evaluated throughout the exegesis of the sections. The details of verses 30-31 work against a posttribulational rapture. After a discussion of the issues involved, it is also concluded that church saints are not described in verses 4-35.

The περὶ δέ of verse 36 introduces a new aspect of the Discourse, i.e., the time at which the pretribulational rapture and day of the Lord (=Tribulation) will come. That day cannot be known (v. 36). This exegesis solves the difficulty in attempting to harmonize verses 36-44 with verses 29-31. The nature of the Noahic flood (vv. 37-39), the change from αἶρω ("taken," v. 39) to παραλαμβάνω ("taken," vv. 40,41), and the thief imagery are seen as further support to this view. Finally, it is concluded that the Discourse is structured around a chiasmus.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<u>ATR</u>	<u>Anglican Theological Review</u>
<u>AUSS</u>	<u>Andrews University Seminary Studies</u>
BAGD	Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick Danker, <u>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</u>
BDF	F. Blass and A. Debrunner, <u>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament</u>
<u>BJRL</u>	<u>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library</u>
<u>BSac</u>	<u>Bibliotheca Sacra</u>
<u>BTB</u>	<u>Biblical Theology Bulletin</u>
<u>CBQ</u>	<u>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</u>
<u>EvQ</u>	<u>Evangelical Quarterly</u>
<u>Exp</u>	<u>Expositor</u>
<u>ExpTim</u>	<u>Expository Times</u>
<u>GTJ</u>	<u>Grace Theological Journal</u>
<u>HTR</u>	<u>Harvard Theological Review</u>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<u>Int</u>	<u>Interpretation</u>
<u>ITQ</u>	<u>Irish Theological Quarterly</u>
<u>JBL</u>	<u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u>
<u>JETS</u>	<u>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</u>

<u>JSNT</u>	<u>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</u>
<u>JT</u>	<u>Journal of Theology</u>
<u>JTS</u>	<u>Journal of Theological Studies</u>
<u>LXX</u>	<u>Septuagint</u>
<u>NICNT</u>	<u>New International Commentary on the New Testament</u>
<u>NIDNTT</u>	<u>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</u>
<u>NovT</u>	<u>Novum Testamentum</u>
<u>NTS</u>	<u>New Testament Studies</u>
<u>PTR</u>	<u>Princeton Theological Review</u>
<u>RevExp</u>	<u>Review and Expositor</u>
<u>SE IV</u>	<u>Studia Evangelica IV</u>
<u>SJT</u>	<u>Scottish Journal of Theology</u>
<u>ST</u>	<u>Studia theologica</u>
<u>Studia BT</u>	<u>Studia Biblica et Theologica</u>
<u>TB</u>	<u>Tyndale Bulletin</u>
<u>TDNT</u>	<u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</u>
<u>TZ</u>	<u>Theologische Zeitschrift</u>
<u>WTJ</u>	<u>Westminster Theological Journal</u>
<u>ZPEB</u>	<u>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</u>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 and 25 has always been of a unique interest to expositors of the Scriptures. For one thing, it is the only extended discourse of Christ recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. In each account, the Discourse is presented just prior to the Jewish plot to put Jesus to death (Matt 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2). But of perhaps greater interest is the prophetic content of the Olivet Discourse. Next to the Apocalypse, the Olivet Discourse contains the most extensive eschatological revelation in any one portion of the NT.¹ The Discourse also clearly displays a chronological statement of events.² For these reasons, Matthew 24-25 has contributed to such watershed doctrines as pretribulationism vis à vis

¹Cf. Gleason L. Archer et al., The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-tribulation? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 80; Robert H. Gundry, The Church and the Tribulation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 34, 129.

²Dallas M. Roark, "The Great Eschatological Discourse," NovT 7 (1964):123. James F. Rand, "The Eschatology of the Olivet Discourse" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1954), pp. 3-4.

posttribulationism, premillennialism vis à vis amillennialism, and dispensational vis à vis covenant theologies.

Some of the incendiary differences which arise from an investigation of this crucial section of prophetic literature are explained by its high degree of difficulty. A brief survey of comments in this regard is worth noting here.

J. A. O'Flynn writes: "Even a cursory reading of a modern commentary on the Eschatological Discourse or Synoptic Apocalypse, as it is sometimes called, is sufficient to make one realize that these chapters in which Christ speaks of the destruction of the Temple and the coming of the Son of Man present special problems and that exegetes are by no means unanimous in their solution of them."¹ C. E. B. Cranfield on Mark 13, noting the comments of others, states: "'No one will deny,' writes Dr. V. Taylor, 'that Mark 13 presents one of the unsolved problems of New Testament exegesis.' Professor A. M. Hunter goes further and says: 'Mark 13 is the biggest problem in the Gospel.'"² Morna Hooker on Mark 13 writes:

If I begin with the statement that it presents us with an enigma--or even a series of enigmas--I shall be on safe ground. Few other chapters in the Bible can have been the subject of so many special studies, and it is not without reason that so much attention has been

¹J. A. O'Flynn, "The Eschatological Discourse," ITQ 18 (1951):277.

²C. E. B. Cranfield, "Mark 13," SJT 6 (1953):189.

devoted to it. The chapter is full of exegetical problems. . . .¹

D. A. Carson on Matthew 24-25 declares: "Few chapters of the Bible have called forth more disagreement among interpreters than Matthew 24 and its parallels. . . ."²

Carson also lists the Olivet Discourse as one of the seven most important eschatological features in Matthew still being investigated by scholars.³ George E. Ladd's opinion is that "there is no passage in the Gospels more replete with critical and exegetical difficulties than the Olivet Discourse."⁴ Desmond Ford suggests that the Olivet Discourse has spawned more scholarly controversy than any other portion of the Synoptics.⁵ Both A. B. Bruce⁶ and

¹Morna D. Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation in Mark 13," BJRL 65 (1982):78.

²D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in vol. 8 of Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 488.

³Ibid., p. 32.

⁴George Eldon Ladd, The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 309, note 5.

⁵Desmond Ford, The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), p. vii.

⁶A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in vol. 1 of Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 4 vols. (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 287.

A. T. Robertson¹ call the Olivet Discourse the most difficult problem in the Synoptic Gospels. Dallas Roark labels Matthew 24 as a "thorn in the flesh of the interpreter."²

The Need for the Study

The combination of the exegetical problems posed by the Discourse together with the continuing debate over its meaning, warrant a fresh look at the structure and chronology involved. The problems and debated issues, even among dispensational, premillennial approaches, cover a wide spectrum. Is the rapture mentioned in the Discourse? Is Matthew's account only concerned with eschatological interests without any historical interests? Where does the seven year tribulation of Daniel's seventieth week begin: Matthew 24:4, 24:9, 24:15 or later? Is the church ever addressed in the Discourse?

Of special interest to this study is the fact that most pretribulational treatments of the Discourse hold that the rapture is not in view in this material.³ While a good

¹A. T. Robertson, The Gospel According to Matthew, vol. 1, in Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), pp. 187-88.

²Roark, "Eschatological Discourse," p. 123.

³Cf. Feinberg's comments in Archer et al., Rapture?, pp. 230-31; the absence of the rapture is indirectly suggested by John Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), pp. 275-85; John F. Walvoord, Matthew, Thy Kingdom Come (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 193; Leon J. Wood, The Bible and Future Events (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House,

case can be made for this perspective and be well harmonized with pretribulationism, an equal or stronger case can be made for the teaching of the rapture in the Discourse. This dissertation will address the subject and the issues involved.

The Intentions and Limitations of the Study

It is generally conceded that Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse tends toward a more topical and eschatological than historical (i.e., written in light of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70) treatment.¹ Matthew's account also tends to use more direct chronological indicators, as will be seen. Most recent treatments of the Discourse have focused attention on Mark because of the believed priority of that Gospel.² But as Fee suggests, "It is well known that opting for the priority of Mark does not 'solve' the Synoptic problem."³ A study of Matthew's Discourse, therefore, may contribute chronological data for

1973), p. 91; Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," The Bible Knowledge Commentary; New Testament ed., eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), p. 79.

¹It will be later questioned whether Luke and/or Mark are so highly historical in their perspective(s) after all. See p. 85, note 2.

²George R. Beasley-Murray, "The Parousia of Mark," RevExp 75 (1978):576.

³Gordon D. Fee, "A Text-critical Look at the Synoptic Problem," NovT 22 (1980):23.

the subject of eschatology.

The length of Matthew 24-25 forces thorough exegetical inquiry to be more limited in its scope. This dissertation has chosen to eliminate from its analysis the highly parabolic content of Matthew 24:45-25:30 and the final pericope concerning the Judgment of the Gentiles (25:31-46). While these major parables (24:45-51, 25:1-13, 14-30) may reveal new prophetic revelation, it is more probable that their interpretation is based upon a proper understanding of Matthew 24:1-44.¹ In addition, it is the position of this author that the Judgment of the Gentiles takes place after the Second Advent (24:31); therefore, it chronologically follows the events described in 24:1-44. An analysis of the teachings derived from this pericope could involve a lengthy dissertation on its own. For these reasons, only a brief reference to the 24:45-25:46 material will be mentioned where such attention is needed in order to unfold a proper understanding of the 24:1-44 unit.

Two additional limitations of the study can be added. First, a history of the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse or of Matthew 24-25 cannot be handled within the scope of this paper.² Second, certain liberal theories of

¹Rand, "Olivet Discourse," p. 10.

²Carson writes, "the history of the interpretation of this chapter is immensely complex." Carson, "Matthew," p. 488. For a broad overview of opinions up to 1954, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future (New York:

the Olivet Discourse which deny inerrancy and inspiration will not be evaluated nor considered to have validity for interpretation. This is to say that all approaches which imply that the prophecies of Matthew 24 were vaticinia ex eventu (predictions after the event) are rejected.¹ Moore uncovers some root causes for much of the liberal approach to the Olivet Discourse:

Behind these [liberal] views [of the Parousia] one can discern the pressure of evolutionistic materialism and of the whole secular climate of thought. Even more apparent is the pressure of a secular philosophy behind the reinterpretation of eschatology in terms of existentialism. This, not unheralded before 1939, has been expressed most radically and consistently during and following the second world war by R. Bultmann and has many adherents today.²

In light of this rejection of liberal presuppositions concerning the Olivet Discourse, a note should be made about supporting quotations in this work. An author

Macmillan and Company, 1954); for more recent works up to 1975, see David Wenham, "Recent Study of Mark 13," TSF Bulletin 71 (1975):6-15; 72 (1975):1-9.

¹Cf. among many, R. H. Shaw, "A Conjecture on the Signs of the End," ATR 47 (1965):100. Brown suggests that the most common liberal view is that Mark composed his "prophecy" prior to the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, but that Matthew and Luke reinterpret his composition in light of actual history. Matthew, therefore, restructures these predictions which history proved false so that later readers could understand them as fulfilled prophecies; Schuyler Brown, "The Matthean Apocalypse," JSNT 4 (1979):3.

²Arthur L. Moore, The Parousia in the New Testament (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), p. 2; see his work for a critique of the liberal views of the Parousia in general, including the views of A. Schweitzer, C. H. Dodd's realized eschatology, and R. Bultmann's demythologized eschatology, pp. 35-48, 49-66, and 67-79 respectively.

or work may be cited as support to a particular perspective within this work without in any way approving the presuppositions, methods, or motivations that may have prompted the remark. Liberal sources may be marshalled to confirm a conservative, evangelical--even premillennial and pretribulational--exegesis of the passage under investigation.

Method of the Study

Most studies of the Olivet Discourse deal with a harmony of the three Synoptic accounts. One or other of the Gospels may be given emphasis to support a presupposition: for example, Matthew, to prove an eschatological theory; Luke, to demonstrate a fulfillment in the A.D. 70 event of the fall of Jerusalem (or other historicizing tendencies); or Mark, to substantiate priority. Woolery, arguing for a historical fulfillment of 24:4-28, calls for a harmonizing approach so that Matthew's supposed eschatological concerns are not emphasized over Mark's and Luke's historical outlook. He offers two important examples: 1) the "abomination of desolation" in Matthew 24:15 becomes in Luke 21:20 Jerusalem surrounded by armies, and 2) the "fig tree" of Matthew 24:32 (often taken as symbolic of a revival of national Israel by dispensationalists) becomes in Luke 21:29 the fig tree "and all the trees."¹

¹Ronnie George Woolery, "The Olivet Discourse in Light of Present-Day Expectations of the Parousia" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary,

Attempts to harmonize the Synoptic accounts of the Olivet Discourse are certainly valid. Such attempts arise out of the correct assumption that the prophetic discourse of Mark 13, Luke 21 and Matthew 24-25 are all the same discourse. However, the rise of redaction criticism, aside from its liberal presuppositions and directions, has aroused the need to look at each Gospel in its own light. Redaction criticism has stimulated concern for the development of the perspective of each individual Gospel writer. In our case, it is proper to be concerned with Matthew's own presentation of the Olivet Discourse, realizing his intentions and purposes may differ somewhat from that of Mark or Luke. Therefore, overdependence upon harmonization of parallel accounts will be avoided.¹ Nevertheless, this investigation will seek to correlate important Synoptic parallels in order to ascertain the Matthean perspective.

Form-criticism and source-criticism have tended to

1977), pp. 159-60.

¹As an example of the inconsistency of using the Synoptic accounts for interpretation, Tasker may be cited (R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957]). The clue to the meaning of the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15) is found in Luke's rendering of the phrase as the encompassing troupes of the Romans (Luke 21:20). Ibid., p. 229. However, where Luke follows the fig tree illustration with the statement, "You know that the kingdom of God is near" (21:31), Matthew is allowed his individual contribution of "You know that it is near at the door" (Matt 24:33). For Tasker, this means the fall of Jerusalem is near. Ibid., p. 231.

dominate the methodology of examination in the Olivet Discourse,¹ including which sayings are authentic to Jesus and which are not. Such methodology with its false presuppositions, has led to views like that of the "Little Apocalypse Theory," i.e., the belief that first or second century Christians attributed to the historic Jesus a brief apocalyptic tract which arose for a different purpose and at a different time than the Gospels that incorporate them.² A study of sources³ may uncover some helpful insights when other methodology is utilized jointly. Nevertheless, such studies often contribute little.⁴ Redaction-critical

¹Beasley-Murray observes that "the attention of scholars has been so absorbed with the problems of the origin, structure, and nature of the discourse, there has been little inclination to give serious consideration to its description of the parousia"; Beasley-Murray, "Parousia of Mark," p. 576.

²For a critique of this theory, see Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future, pp. 1-112.

³For a rather recent, detailed analysis of the Olivet Discourse from a source-critical methodology, consult David Wenham, The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse, Gospel Perspectives:4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984). He argues for a pre-synoptic tradition used independently by all the Synoptics but retained most consistently in Matthew. His conclusions throw question marks against the form-critical assumptions that the Discourse was a compilation of several separate traditions over an extended period of time. Also, much material thought to be redactional is declared, after all, to be traditional.

⁴Lambrecht is right in asserting that, if only the sources of Matthew's Discourse are investigated, the actual structure and thought cannot be grasped; J. Lambrecht, "The Parousia Discourse: Composition and Content in Mt., XXIV-XXV," in L'Évangile selon Matthieu. Rédaction et théologie, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1972), p. 311.

approaches often vainly attempt to discover the nature of the "Evangelist's community" and the occasion of his writing.¹ The author concludes with Ford, "The contradictory opinions extant in this area [the study of the Olivet Discourse] suggest that presuppositions and prejudices deflect the true intent of exegesis."² The methodology employed in this work will be the traditional exegetical task of the grammatical-historical-theological approach.

Presuppositions of the Study

Unity and Authenticity of the Discourse

It is of no surprise that any study of Matthew 24 involves various preconceived ideas. This author has many. First, the unity and authenticity of the Olivet Discourse will be assumed. Geldenhuys writes against the form-critical attacks on the unity and authenticity of the Discourse, "It is a cause of thanksgiving to know that the authority of God's word depends neither on our understanding nor on our defense of it, however helpful exercises toward

¹For example, C. B. Cousar, "Eschatology and Mark's *Theologia Crucis*. A Critical Analysis of Mark 13," *Int* 24 (1970):321-35; James P. Martin, "The Church in Matthew," *Int* 29 (1975):41-56.

Carson is well within the mark when he affirms that speculation enters into most attempts to define a specific occasion and church community for Matthew; Carson, "Matthew," pp. 22-23. A dialectical philosophy influences the thinking of those who attempt to see the apparent conflicting strands within the Gospel (such as Matt 10:5-6 with 28:19,20) as actual conflicts within Matthew's community.

²Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. vii.

these goals might be."¹

Use of Extra-Biblical Sources

Second, the use of apocryphal, rabbinical, and pseudepigraphical writings will not be extensive. Ford, in reference to the influence of the OT, especially Daniel, upon the eschatology of the Olivet Discourse, writes to this issue: "There exists a remarkable homogeneity in the New Testament presentation of Danielic themes, and there is little need to look outside the Old Testament itself for the main elements of New Testament eschatology and apocalyptic."² Ford's remark, while it eliminates the need for research in extra-biblical sources for an understanding of the Olivet Discourse, may raise the question of the relationship of the Discourse to apocalyptic literature in general. Fuller clarifies this relationship:

The really striking aspect of the relation between the Discourse and Jewish apocalypticism is not their similarity but their difference. The rewards of a search for parallel passages in the Rabbinic literature, in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and in the Dead Sea Scrolls are meagre indeed. . . . Even the few parallels that can be uncovered in this literature are frequently themselves related to Old Testament passages. Missing from the Discourse are the extreme visionary scenes of

¹Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel Luke, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 19. For a defense of the unity and authenticity of the Discourse in light of negative critical thought, see George C. Fuller, "The Structure of the Olivet Discourse" (Th.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1964), pp. 11-31.

²Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 308.

contemporary Judaism, yet there is present the imagery and thought of the Old Testament.¹

It is concluded for this investigation that, whatever evidence can be culled from extra-biblical sources, the canonical books of the OT will be considered the inspired prototype.

Theological Presuppositions

Third, while an objective analysis of the Olivet Discourse will be attempted, the scriptural evidence elsewhere has led the author to favor a premillennial² and pretribulational³ position of eschatology, including a

¹Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 20. For a discussion of the differences between the Olivet Discourse and apocalyptic, see Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future, pp. 212-13.

²Among many that may be cited as works to defend this position, see Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959); Pentecost, Things to Come; and John F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959); Ladd, Presence of the Future.

³A few selections which defend the pretribulational persuasion include, from a theological basis; Gerald B. Stanton, Kept From the Hour (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), John F. Walvoord, The Rapture Question (rev. ed., Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Co., 1957); for a defense of pretribulationism in light of the post-tribulationism of Robert H. Gundry, see John A. Sproule, In Defense of Pretribulationism (rev. and exp., Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1980) and John F. Walvoord, The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976).

Exegetical defenses are more rare. For a thorough exegetical approach, especially with reference to the key text in Revelation 3:10, consult the work of John A. Sproule, "An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism." For a more limited exegetical approach, see Zane C. Hodges,

dispensational outlook¹ which accompanies the latter system. However, the issues concerning the presence or absence of the church in the Olivet Discourse will be entertained in the body of the paper. It should further be noted that these theological assumptions include a belief in the futurity of the seventieth week of Daniel² and the scope of this paper prevents a defense of it also. One more debatable theological assumption regards the terminus a quo for the day of the Lord. Some evidence suggests that Armageddon is the starting point for the day of the Lord, but the author holds that the OT and NT weight as a whole points to the inception of the day of the Lord to be coincident with the inception of the seventieth week of Daniel,

"The Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11," in Walvoord: A Tribute, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982) and Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," BSac 137 (1980):252-66; David G. Winfrey, "The Great Tribulation: Kept 'Out of' or 'Through?'" GTJ 3 (1982):3-18; Thomas R. Edgar, "Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10," GTJ 3 (1982):19-49.

¹For a defense of dispensationalism, see Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965); for a shorter presentation, consult Stanley D. Toussaint, "A Biblical Defense of Dispensationalism," in Walvoord: A Tribute (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982).

²The defense for the futurity of Daniel's seventieth week is well established in such works as Paul D. Feinberg, "An Exegetical and Theological Study of Daniel 9:24-27," in Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg, eds. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), pp. 189-220; Harold W. Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), pp. 115-39; Pentecost, Things to Come, pp. 239-50; Wood, Future Events, pp. 57-60.

the latter commencing as it does with the postrapture signing of the covenant with Israel (Dan 9:27).¹

Hermeneutical Presuppositions

Prophecy presents several difficult hermeneutical questions. The author is indebted to many others who have defended the application of the normal or literal method of interpretation to prophecy.² This method will be presumed to be the superior method throughout. Where applicable, it will be demonstrated that an allegorical or spiritualizing method will yield inadequate interpretation.

Interpretation of an individual passage cannot afford to be myopic. The whole panorama of biblical revelation must be brought to bear on any given prophetic passage without forcing the text against its natural meaning.

¹This position regarding the day of the Lord will be essential to the conclusions of this paper on Matthew 24:43 where the thief imagery appears. It is worth considering the remark of Pentecost here, "If the Day of the Lord did not begin until the second advent, since that advent is preceded by signs, the Day of the Lord could not come as a 'thief in the night,' unexpected and unheralded, as it is said it will come in 1 Thessalonians 5:2. The only way this day could break unexpectedly upon the world is to have it begin immediately after the rapture of the church. It is thus concluded that the Day of the Lord is that extended period of time beginning with God's dealing with Israel after the rapture at the beginning of the tribulation period. . . ."; Pentecost, Things to Come, pp. 230-31. For further discussion, see p. 237, note 4.

²To name only a few, Pentecost, Things to Come, pp. 1-15; Charles C. Ryrie, The Basis of Premillennial Faith (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), pp. 34-47; and Paul Lee Tan, Interpretation of Prophecy (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), pp. 29-39.

In other words, an individual prophetic passage cannot be interpreted in isolation from the whole of prophetic Scripture. Second Peter 1:20 may support this: "No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of its own (ἰδίᾳ) interpretation" (author's translation).¹ To avoid this principle can only result in confused exegesis. On the other hand, the outcome of the proper use of this principle will involve incorporating such eschatological information as contained in Daniel and Revelation. This is in contradistinction to Beasley-Murray, for example, who states that the "later developed doctrine" of the Antichrist described in Revelation 13 and 17 should not be read into the context of Mark 13:14 (Matt 24:15).² The analogy of faith prohibits excluding the influence and help of any one portion of Scripture upon another (while at the same time being cautious so as not to alter exegetical details having been derived from the passage under consideration). Matthew 24 must harmonize with all of inspired prophecy.

The primary problem in interpreting the Discourse, as will be seen, is the relationship of the end of the age

¹Cf. Ryrie, *Premillennial Faith*, p. 41. ἰδίᾳ ("one's own") in 2 Peter is used five additional times beside the 1:20 reference (2:16,22; 3:3,16,17). In every other use in this epistle, the referent for ἰδίᾳ is the immediately preceding subject. In 1:20, the preceding subject is προφητεία. Therefore, "its own" may be a more likely translation.

²NIDNTT, s.v. "τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως," by George R. Beasley-Murray, 1:75.

with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70 which appear to be intertwined in the statements of the Discourse (cf. Matt 24:3, for example).¹ This relationship is sometimes explained by the hermeneutical principle called "double fulfillment."² Closely related to double fulfillment views of the Olivet Discourse would be those views which describe this prophetic phenomenon in terms of typology,³ foreshadowing,⁴ or "precursive fulfillment."⁵ Still others mention prophetic perspective,⁶ prophetic

¹Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future, p. 113.

²This law as it relates to prophecy is discussed by Ryrie, Premillennial Faith, p. 45, and Tan, Interpretation, pp. 178-87 et al.

The following is a small sampling of those who use this terminology or hermeneutical concept to describe Matthew 24 or parallels: Cranfield, "Mark 13," p. 300; J. K. Howard, "Our Lord's Teaching Concerning His Parousia: A Study in the Gospel of Mark," EvQ 38 (1966):152-53; Robertson, Matthew, p. 188; Henry Alford, The Four Gospels, in vol. 1 of The Greek New Testament, 4 vols. (Boston: Lee and Shephard, Publishers, 1878), p. 235; Broadus, Matthew, pp. 479-80.

³Broadus says his view does not rely upon some "double sense" but upon scriptural use of types; Ibid., p. 480.

⁴Geldenhuys, Luke, pp. 523-24.

⁵Gundry, The Tribulation, pp. 129, 131.

⁶C. L. Holman, "The Idea of an Imminent Parousia in the Synoptic Gospels," Studia BT 3 (1973):31; also Howard, "Parousia: Mark," p. 153.

foreshortening,¹ or "telescoping."² Although many scholars blend together the use of prophetic perspective with the thoughts of foreshadowing, the two hermeneutical concepts should be kept distinct. Prophetic perspective (prophetic foreshortening or the law of double reference) "means that two or more future events, widely separated in time, may be seen by the prophet in a single profile or side by side."³ Focus in this hermeneutical guideline is upon two events, generally separated by a gap of time in their actual fulfillment, rather than upon one event which is foreshadowed or typified by an earlier, precursive fulfillment.

As will be seen in later discussions, those holding to a double fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse, interpret Jesus' teaching to comprise a twice-fulfilled, single event--the events of the end of the age--which are typically fulfilled in the A.D. 70 events. Scholars who claim that prophetic perspective is utilized, tend to perceive two separate events--A.D. 70 and the Parousia--mingled together in the teachings of Jesus.

¹Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," pp. 147-49; Ray Summers, "Matthew 24-25; An Exposition," RevExp 59 (1962):509; William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew, in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 846.

²Douglas J. Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 192.

³Tan, Interpretation, p. 91.

Prophetic perspective (double reference or foreshadowing) most often stands unquestioned hermeneutically. It is a common occurrence in the OT prophets. But not all accept the law of double fulfillment (one event fulfilled twice), perhaps because it borders on sensus plenior. One pretribulationist argues: "A single passage can refer to one thing only, and if it is prophecy, it can have only one fulfillment unless the text itself states that it can have many fulfillments."¹ Kaiser also rejects the law of double fulfillment, replacing it with such terminology as "generic fulfillment" or "successive fulfillment." He defines generic prophecies as those prophecies in which "a single prediction embraced a whole series of fulfillments when all those fulfillments shared something that was part and parcel of all of them."² His reasoning for opting for generic fulfillment is worthy of reproduction here:

The problem with "double fulfillment" is threefold: (1) it restricts the fulfillments to two isolated events and only two; (2) it usually slides easily into a theory of double senses or dual intentionality in which the human author usually is aware of none of these referents or meanings or at most only one (if it is contemporaneous) with the other or both fulfillments left as surprises for the future generation in which they take place; and (3) it focuses only on the predictive word (usually given in abstraction from the times in which that word came) and on the final fulfillment without

¹Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events (San Antonio: Ariel Press, 1982), p. 5.

²Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Promise of the Arrival of Elijah in Malachi and the Gospels," GTJ 3 (1982):232.

any attention being given as to how God kept that word alive in the years that intervened between the divine revelation and the climactic fulfillment.

Only generic prophecy can handle all three foci: (1) the revelatory word; (2) the series of intervening historical events which perpetuate that word; and (3) corporate, collective, and generic wholeness of that final fulfillment with whatever aspect of realization that event has had in the interim as God continued to promise by his Word and to act by his power throughout history. The intervening events, then, while being generically linked with that final event, were earnest, down-payments, samplers, partial teasers until the total payment came in God's climactic fulfillment.¹

Kaiser's points are well taken and the Olivet Discourse must be viewed in light of the possibility of generic prophecy. However, to say that the intervening events are "down-payments, samplers, partial teasers" until the final fulfillment seems little different than the concepts of typological or precursory fulfillment.

Greek and English Texts

Unless otherwise stated, the New American Standard Bible² will be used for citations of the English text. For the Greek text, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text³ will serve as the standard text, with

¹Ibid.

²New American Standard Bible (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1960).

³Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, eds., The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). The author favors the majority text theory. For a defense of this view, consult: Ibid., pp. ix-xiii; Zane C. Hodges, "Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Response [with Rejoinder and Surrejoinder]," JETS 21 (1978):143-55; 157-60; 161-69;

reference being made in comparison to the critical text of Novum Testamentum Graece, 26th edition.¹ Nevertheless, the exegesis of Matthew 24 rarely, if ever, hinges on a textual decision.

The Procedure of the Study

This study will attempt to discuss first the various approaches and structures offered for Matthew 24:4-44 (Chapter II). The approaches may be broadly divided into the historical approaches (the Discourse up to v. 31 or v. 35 is now fulfilled), historical-eschatological approaches (parts of the Discourse of vv. 1-35 are fulfilled and parts are not) and eschatological approaches (most or all of the Discourse is yet to be fulfilled).

This discussion will lead to an analysis of the context of the Discourse, first from the perspective of the place of the Discourse within the Gospel as a whole, and then from the perspective of the context of Matthew 23:29-39 and the setting of the Discourse in 24:1-2 (Chapter III).

Wilbur N. Pickering, The Identity of the New Testament Text (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980). While not strictly holding to the majority text exclusively, Sturz has adequately demonstrated the reliability of the Byzantine text-type as an external witness; Harry Z. Sturz, The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984).

¹Eberhard Nestle et al., eds., Novum Testamentum Graece (26th ed., Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibel Stiftung, 1979).

The remainder of the study will precede section by section, examining each for chronological indicators. The purpose will not be to provide a commentary but to present exegetical data crucial to chronology and structure. Chapter IV will comprise the unit 24:3-14, Chapter V the unit 24:15-28, Chapter VI the unit 24:29-35, and Chapter VII the unit 24:36-44. A conclusion (Chapter VIII) will review the exegetical findings and summarize the results.

It will become evident in the analysis of the Discourse that the divisions of the Discourse chosen above are a result of the investigation and not merely arbitrary. It will be shown that the Discourse begins at 24:3. Therefore, the previous verses (chapter 23 and 24:1,2) constitute background information. The Discourse begins with the question of the disciples (24:3) to which the Lord gives an answer in survey fashion (4-14). The survey is complete with the reference to the coming of the end (v. 14). The subjects of verses 15-28 mark it off as a unit as the analysis will demonstrate, and verse 15 is distinguished from the previous material by an inferential *oŷv*.

Verse 29 makes a transition from the days of tribulation mentioned in the previous verses to the time "immediately after the tribulation of those days." A climax is reached at verse 31 with the coming of the Son of Man and the angelic gathering mentioned there. Since the parable of the fig tree (vv. 32-35) describes the time of the

Parousia, it will be discussed as part of the 29-31 unit.

The 36-44 unit is set off by an introductory *περὶ δέ*. This phrase, together with the unique contributions of these verses, suggests a conceptual contrast with verses 29-35.

The Thesis of the Study

This study will attempt to demonstrate that the First Gospel begins the Olivet Discourse with the disciples' question in 24:3. From this point onward, Matthew presents a decidedly eschatological chronology, i.e., a description of the seventieth week of Daniel. Verses 4-14 survey this seven-year tribulation from its inception to its climax at the end of history as we now know it. By the literary technique of recapitulation, verse 15 returns chronologically to a time period within the yet future tribulation. The description of this period in verses 15-28 harmonizes with the premillennial portrait of the final three-and-a-half years of the tribulation, including the description of the abomination of desolation.

It will also be argued that a time gap cannot exist between verses 28 and 29. Instead, the Second Advent will immediately follow the tribulation events of verses 15-28. Attempts to find in these verses a posttribulational rapture and resurrection run into more difficulties than pretribulational explanations of the passage, i.e., that

Jewish rather than church concerns are the center focus of these verses.

Both posttribulationists and pretribulationists propose that Matthew 24:36 addresses the same event as the Second Advent of verses 29-31. This investigation suggests that while the Second Coming of Christ is as highly predictable through preceding signs as summer is predictable to the signs of the springtime budding of a fig tree (vv. 32-36), verses 36-44 present a contrasting event. Verse 36 describes the imminent, unpredictable coming of the day of the Lord and the accompanying pretribulational rapture. As such, the Lord answers the first question of the disciples (v. 3) as to how they might know when all the end-time events will begin. When the events within the day of the Lord are present, then Christ's coming is near. But the day of the Lord itself will come like a thief in the night (vv. 42-44).

CHAPTER II
STRUCTURES AND CHRONOLOGICAL APPROACHES
TO MATTHEW 24

Structure--how the various parts fit together with each other--is one of the most difficult interpretive problems in Matthew 24.¹ Various means and methods have been brought into service in order to discover this structure, chronology, and resultant meaning. These methods may be broadly divided into two categories: analysis by literary devices and analysis by grammatical-historical-theological methods (traditional interpretations). The purpose of this chapter will be to present an overview of these approaches to the Olivet Discourse together with a brief evaluation. This will prepare the way for later discussion and exegesis.

Analysis by Literary Devices

Syllable Count

One unique method of structural analysis focuses on the number of syllables in the text to determine its structure. Noting that Matthew was interested in numerical

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 491.

arrangements as a literary technique, Sibinga applies the criterion of a syllable count to Matthew 24. He claims that such a criterion is unambiguous.¹ Accordingly, his investigation uncovers a total of 3300 syllables. Exactly one-third of the Discourse (1100 syllables) marks the close of the Discourse proper (Matt 24:1-31) and the transitional verse, verse 32. Matthew 24:32-25:46 forms a series of seven parables.² Verse 32 links the "apocalyptic vision" ending at verse 31 with the rest of the Discourse.³ Further support is uncovered in the fact that 24:30 and the coming of the Son of Man reaches exactly 1000 syllables, while the next fifty-three (53) syllables, a mysteriously repeated number in the Discourse, fills out the next verse, verse 31.⁴

¹J. Smit Sibinga, "The Structure of the Apocalyptic Discourse, Matthew 24 and 25," ST 29 (1975):71. Sibinga feels that this criterion confirms the text of the passage, too; *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²Incidental to the discussion at hand, but nevertheless a vital concern, is the inclusion of 25:31-46 as a parable. The writer seriously objects to this, for this unit is prophecy with metaphorical language, and not parable; John F. Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End," BSac 129 (1972):308. Even 24:32-25:30 does not likely include more than three genuine parables.

³Sibinga, "Apocalyptic Discourse," p. 76. That Matthew 24 is to be seen as an apocalyptic vision should also be opposed since the normal features of apocalyptic literature are strikingly absent, viz. visions or dreams, symbolisms constructed around animals, numbers or colors, messages transmitted by angels, etc.; cf. NIDNTT, s.v. "γενεα," by R. Morgenthauer, 2:37; see also Chapter I, pp. 10-11.

⁴Sibinga, "Apocalyptic Discourse," p. 79.

While such a study is fascinating, several major weaknesses come to the forefront and raise serious questions for those who would adopt this methodology. Only the foremost objection needs to be stated: textually-grounded exegesis is by far the best determinative rule for all structure and interpretation. Any literary forms must be subjected to the scrutiny of grammatical-historical-theological analysis. As will be seen in the next chapter, based upon exegetical data the Discourse most probably begins at 24:3 rather than 24:1.¹ This alone would throw all of Sibinga's calculations into disarray.

Chiastic Structures

Chiastic structures for Matthew 24 are also an analytical attempt to discover key interpretive solutions. Kidder, by means of a chiastic structure of chapters 23-25, maintains that the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom (24:14) and the abomination of desolation (24:15) match at the pivotal point of the chiasmus. These verses, then, can be seen as the division of the two events the disciples asked about, i.e., the more nearby destruction of Jerusalem and the more distant Parousia. Generally, all material before 24:14-15 describes the A.D. 70 event and all the material after describes the Parousia. This chiastic structure

¹See Chapter III, pp. 54-56; Sibinga himself sees that an inclusio marks the unit at v. 3 and v. 30; Ibid., p. 78.

brings together in parallel position the "this generation" of 23:36 and of 24:34. The conclusion is that various separate signs and separate "generations" precede each event.¹

Avila² and Thompson³ are two others who analyze the Discourse chiastically. Thompson's structure of Mark's discourse is as follows (Matthew's verses are in the second parenthesis):

- A. Deceivers (Mark 13:5,6) (Matt 24:4-6)
- B. Wars (7,8) (7,8)
- C. Persecutions (9-13) (9-14)
- B.¹ War [destruction of temple] (14-20a) (15-22a)
- A.¹ Deceivers (21-23) (23-28)⁴

Avila records an identical pattern⁵ but develops the material considerably to extend throughout chapters 24-25. In a summary fashion, his broad chiastic outline would look as follows:

- A. Question of the time of the End (24:3a)
- B. Question of the signs of the End (24:3b)

¹S. Joseph Kidder, "'This Generation' in Matthew 24:34," AUSS 21 (1983):207.

²Mariano Avila, "The Fall of Jerusalem and the Parousia of the Son of Man: an Interpretation of Crucial Verses in Matthew 24" (Th.M. thesis, Calvin Theological Seminary, 1979), pp. 75-78.

³W. G. Thompson, "An Historical Perspective in the Gospel of Matthew," JBL 93 (1974):251.

⁴Ibid. Thompson cites as his source, J. Lambrecht, Die Redaktion der Markus-Apokalypse (An Bib 28; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1967), pp. 285-94.

⁵Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 75; no sources are cited in support of his outline of 24:4-28.

- B.¹ Answers--signs (24:4-31)
 A.¹ Answer--time (24:32-25:30)
 Climax: The Last Judgment (25:31-46)¹

The major criticism of all these chiastic patterns is the same criticism offered for Sibinga's syllable counting methodology: all literary patterns must be validated by the grammatical-historical-theological concerns of exegesis. In both Avila's and Thompson's view, the parallel of wars (24:7,8) with the war on Jerusalem (24:15) does not prevent them from limiting the latter prophecy/warning to an A.D. 70 fulfillment. This interpretation will be shown in later discussions to lack support. On the other hand, chiasmus is not to be rejected as being irrelevant.

Analysis by Grammatical-Historical- Theological Methods

An overview of the multifarious structures and outlines based on primary exegetical work can help later discussions of the Discourse itself. Others have adequately categorized these approaches,² but a brief rehearsal and evaluation is essential for the purpose of this study. The chief difficulty which gives rise to these approaches

¹Ibid., pp. 75-77.

²Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future*, pp. 113-71; Carson, "Matthew," pp. 492-95. Rand categorizes according to millennial views; Rand, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 71-88. He notes that there is very little difference between post-millennial and amillennial views; Ibid., p. 77. This is one reason the author has not categorized the exegetical approaches by eschatological perspectives.

is conceded to be the relationship of two events thought to be prophesied in the Discourse: the A.D. 70 event, now far removed from us, and the yet-future Parousia.¹ Broadly, the relationship has been approached in three ways: historical (the Discourse up to v. 31 or v. 36 is now fulfilled), historical-eschatological (parts of the Discourse of vv. 1-35 are now fulfilled and parts are yet to be fulfilled), and eschatological (most or all of the Discourse is yet to be fulfilled).

Historical Approach

The historical approach finds in most of Matthew 24 past fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus, particularly fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Kik, for example, views 24:4-35 as all fulfilled in the Roman invasion of Jerusalem in the first century.² Christ's coming according to verses 29-31 was a coming of the Son of Man in judgment on the Jewish nation rather than an eschatological, visible coming of Christ yet to take place.³ Tasker sees this similarly. The description of the cosmic catastrophe is in actuality symbolic language for the Roman

¹Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future, p. 113.

²J. Marcellus Kik, Matthew Twenty-Four, An Exposition (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1948), pp. 11-12. Kik does find the events of the final coming of Christ in 24:36-44; Ibid.

³Ibid., pp. 72-73.

conquest of Jerusalem. The spread of the Christian church which followed it is described in verse 31.¹

Kik argues for a historical fulfillment based upon Matthew 24:34, ". . . this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."² But such a procedure seems to violate a well known hermeneutical principle that suggests clear passages (in this case 24:29-31) should be used to interpret the unclear ones (here, 24:34) and never vice versa. Tasker finds the phrase, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days" (24:29) the interpretive key for taking the 24:29-31 unit as a symbolic description of the destruction of Jerusalem.³ Conclusive proof cannot be marshalled from this phraseology either, since it merely unites the previous material to the 24:29-31 unit.⁴

¹Tasker, Matthew, pp. 225-26; Tasker does, however, see vv. 4-14 describing the interadvent age; Ibid., pp. 223-24.

²Kik, Matthew, pp. 11-12.

³Tasker, Matthew, p. 225.

⁴The historical approach is not limited to the conservative camp. S. Brown argues from a liberal stance that the unity of 24:4-31 leads to fulfillment in the Jewish War; Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," pp. 3-4.

A selective list of other expositors who hold that 24:4-31 is fulfilled prophecy includes, Lloyd Gaston, No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 484; André Feuillet, "le discours de Jésus sur la ruine du temple d'après Marc XIII et Luc XXI:5-36," RB 36 (1949):351-56; Ezra P. Gould, The Gospel According to St. Mark, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp. 250-52; R. T. France, Jesus and the Old Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), p. 232; O'Flynn, "Eschatological Discourse," pp. 277-81.

Other chronological approaches hold to this unity also, especially the eschatological approach. Since the two major passages upon which this approach rests are 24:29-31 and 24:32-35, further support and refutation will be handled at that point.

Historical-Eschatological Approach

Most evangelical scholars view the Discourse as somehow touching both the fall of Jerusalem and the future coming of Christ. But a number of variations exist as to how these two events are to be related.

Division of the two events not distinguishable

Broadus is a typical example of those who see in the Discourse a reference to two events which blend together in such a way that defies precise division in the text.

So then the discourse begins with the destruction of the temple and city and ends with the final coming in judgment [25:31-46]: how does it make the transition from the former to the latter topic? Every attempt to assign a definite point of division between the two topics has proven a failure.¹

Broadus does make it clear that certain verses relate to one event or the other. For example, 24:15-21,34 foretell the destruction of Jerusalem while 25:31-46 are clearly descriptive of the final judgment. But in his view, it is the precise transition point in the text that is impossible

¹Broadus, Matthew, pp. 479-80.

to ascertain.¹ Ridderbos adds that the distinction of the two events can only be made a posteriori, i.e., in light of their fulfillment.² This mixture of two events now separated in time is explained by prophetic foreshortening and/or typology.³ The historical judgment on the city of Jerusalem may symbolize the coming Day of Judgment.⁴

An obvious strength of this viewpoint is the weight it gives to the unity of the prophecy. But Carson lists two weaknesses of an indecisive division in the text: 1) it may lead some to suggest that Jesus was in error concerning the time of the Parousia, and 2) it avoids the specific time references in the text such as 24:29, "Immediately after the tribulation. . . ."⁵ It is this second objection which is crucial. Avila mentions six important temporal particles or clauses in Matthew 24: 1) "but that is not yet the end" (v. 6b); 2) "the beginning of birth pangs" (v. 8); 3) "and

¹Ibid.; cf. Robertson, Matthew, 1:188; Hendriksen, Matthew, pp. 846-47.

²Herman Ridderbos, The Coming of the Kingdom, trans. H. de Jongste, ed. Raymond O. Zorn (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1962), p. 496.

³Broadus, Matthew, p. 480; Geldenhuys, Luke, pp. 523-24; idem, "Our Lord's Teaching Concerning the End," EvQ 19 (1947):162; Anthony A. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), pp. 148-49.

⁴Alfred Plummer, Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 338.

⁵Carson, "Matthew," p. 492.

then the end shall come" (v. 14); 4) "therefore, when you see" (v. 15); 5) "in those days" (vv. 19,22a,22b); and 6) "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (v. 29).¹ To this may be added the frequent use of *τὸτε* (24:9,10,14,16,21,23,30). All these temporal indicators must be considered.

Division of the two events distinguishable

It is difficult to characterize and categorize the varying views in this approach, but the following is suggested for simplification.

Interadvent unmentioned

Several commentators explain the two events as an example of prophetic perspective, i.e., a gap exists between the two events but is not prophesied in the Discourse. Only as history unfolds does this fact present itself. For example, Summers holds that 24:4-28 refer to the A.D. 70 event while 24:29-31 refer to the Second Coming. The transition from verse 28 to verse 29 is explained by the principle of prophetic foreshortening and thereby alleviates the difficulty of the phrase, "immediately after the tribulation of those days . . ." (v. 29).² Woolery and Fuller

¹Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," pp. 80-81.

²Summers, "Matthew 24-25," p. 509.

outline the chapter in essentially the same way.¹ Part of the stated motive for distinguishing the two events in this way is to avoid the subjective elements of typology or foreshadowing.²

If this gap now exists between the two events, perhaps an unfulfilled condition exists. This conditional approach is certainly not held by all those scholars in this group, but it may be mentioned here. This unusual perspective suggests that the two events of the fall of Jerusalem and the future Parousia were prophesied as a unit, contingent upon the conversion of the Jews and the evangelistic efforts of the church. Such a contingent nature of the Discourse's prophecies is said to find support in Jonah where a prophesied judgment was reverted by the repentant city of Nineveh (3:4-10).³ One author writes, commenting on Mark 13:30 (Matt 24:34):

It is possible that He [Jesus] believed that if the early church proved faithful to its missionary commission, and if the chastened Jewish nation repented, the end would transpire in that same Age. It is this linking of the Gospel proclamation to the world with the end of the Age that proves the hint of the contingent

¹Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 137-40, 163, 183; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 303-5; Fuller, however, does see some relevance of verses 4-8 for the present age; Ibid., p. 302.

²Cf. Ibid., p. 163; Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 68.

³Ronald A. Knox, "The Gospels," in A New Testament Commentary (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd., 1955), p. 56; Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 76.

element. Such proclamation would be dependent upon the whole-hearted dedication of the church. An uncertain human element is involved.¹

This author stresses the human element, but seems to leave out the divine element. Nevertheless, it is curiously interesting that dispensationalists, adhering to an eschatological approach, have employed a similar reasoning:

In conformity with the general method of predictive prophecy, our Lord pictured together future events which would be outrolled separately in their historical fulfillment. This method is not something wholly arbitrary but has a gracious purpose. Within certain limits, it leaves room in history for the interplay of both divine sovereignty and human freedom. The future event is always certain, but the time element (with certain important exceptions) has elasticity. This is particularly true of the present church age. Thus, it should not be surprising to find interpreters confusing the destruction of Jerusalem with the end of the age. For, viewed from the standpoint of Jewish opportunity and responsibility, the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 might have led directly to the end of the age, as we shall see in considering the Book of Acts [emphasis added].²

All these attempts to envision a prophetic "valley" between the two "mountains" of the A.D. 70 event and the Parousia use a valid and often-used hermeneutical principle. The real question is whether Matthew 24 can be explained by this means. The natural impression upon reading 24:29, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . , " is to see here a definite link to the previously mentioned "tribulation" (v. 21) and "those days" (vv. 19, 22[2]). The Parousia is brought together with the same

¹Ibid.

²McClain, Greatness of the Kingdom, pp. 365-66.

"tribulation" period just mentioned so that the former is a successive event chronologically.¹ Perhaps a gap could be inferred if the text read simply, "After the tribulation of those days . . . ," but the addition of "immediately (εὐθέως) after . . ." rules out this possibility. It is of little wonder why the 29-31 unit becomes for this view the "central problem of the discourse."² A more detailed discussion will be offered in Chapter VI (24:29-31).

Interadvent depicted

Among other reasons, the difficulty in connecting 24:29 to the preceding material has led many to suggest that the prophecies of verses 4-28 include a prediction of the interadvent age, i.e., a panorama of events from the ascension to the Parousia. Barclay is one who finds the church age in one of many strands of truth flowing through the Discourse. These strands include the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus (1-2, 15-22), the day of the Lord and Second Coming (3, 6-8, 14, 27-28, 29-31), and the persecution of and threats against the interadvent church (4-5, 9-10, 11-13, 23-26).³ In the opinion of J. K. Howard, such

¹A. H. McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices (re-print ed., London: Macmillan and Company, 1957), p. 352.

²Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 183. Summers says, "This is perhaps the most difficult part of this discourse"; Summers, "Matthew 24-25," p. 506.

³William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 1957), 2:334-36.

scattered divisions may be due to the fact that the Discourse is not a "continuous address."¹ His arrangement also includes the interadvent era: the fall of Jerusalem Matthew 24:15-22 (Mark 13:14-20); events of the interim, 24:9-14 (Mark 13:9-13); and the Parousia, 24:6-7, 29-31 (Mark 13:7-8, 24-27).² Cranfield simply views the 24:4-28 section as a prophecy of the time between the incarnation and the Parousia.³

Carson's analysis offers a slight variation to these views. He holds that 24:4-28, 32-35 pictures the tribulation that comes upon the interadvent period between the ascension and the Second Coming. This period is characterized by a "particularly violent display of judgment" at the fall of Jerusalem (vv. 15-21).⁴ His structure of the Discourse is presented this way:

Matthew 24: 4-14	General Interadvent Age
15-21	The Great Distress of the Interadvent Age
22-28	Return to the Interadvent Age ⁵

The strength of the interadvent understanding of the Olivet Discourse is its solution to the 24:29 phrase, "Immediately after the tribulation. . . ." No gap needs to

¹Howard, "Parousia: Mark," p. 152.

²Ibid.

³Cranfield, "Mark 13," pp. 298-300.

⁴Carson, "Matthew," p. 495.

⁵Ibid., p. 501.

be supplied; the appearance of the Son of Man (vv. 29-31) follows immediately the "tribulation" of the entire church age. Carson's adaptations have several additional advantages. First, his structure avoids the divided, seemingly haphazard strands of truth held by Barclay and others, and maintains the continuous nature of the address which Howard denies. Second, as he himself notes, his approach has the support of the "literary and structural arguments that suggest vv. 4-28 must be taken as one time period with vv. 15-21 as a critical part of it."¹ The real question is, however, does the Discourse in its description of "tribulation" depict the interadvent period of the church?²

Eschatological Approach

As the exegesis of the Discourse will reveal, this paper maintains that an eschatological approach offers the best explanation for the details of the passage. The eschatological approach views the Discourse of 24:4-31 as containing predictions of predominantly or exclusively future events. Exact outlines of structure and chronology vary. According to Burnett, 24:2 concludes the thought of

¹Ibid., p. 502.

²There exists a view that the Olivet Discourse presents a continuous account of Christian history up to the Parousia without any reference to the A.D. 70 event, at least after 24:7,8. See Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future, pp. 127-31; Carson, "Matthew," p. 492. It is not widely held, and its strengths and weaknesses are common to other approaches, especially the eschatological approach.

divine judgment fulfilled in A.D. 70, and Matthew begins a new thought in 24:3 concerning the eschatological events that lead to the Parousia.¹ While the eschatological approach is not limited to dispensationalists,² many dispensationalists hold a position nearly identical to Burnett's. Pentecost cites four dispensational approaches. In summary, they are: 1) 24:4-8 the present church age, verses 9-26 the future tribulation; 2) 24:4-8 the first half of the future tribulation, verses 9-26 the second half; 3) 24:4-14 the first half, verses 15-26 the second half; and 4) 24:4-14 both present age and tribulation, and verses 15-26 the future tribulation.³

It can be seen from Pentecost's overview that all those who find an eschatological tribulation in the Discourse do not entirely exclude the interadvent age. For example, Walvoord, a dispensationalist, adopts the fourth position listed above in which both the present age and the tribulation are described in general terms in the 24:4-14 unit.⁴ More limited is the first position above; verses 4-8 explains the present age, but Jesus turns to the future

¹Fred W. Burnett, The Testament of Jesus-Sophia A Redaction-Critical Study of the Eschatological Discourse in Matthew (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1981), pp. 164-69.

²For example, Burnett is not a dispensationalist.

³Pentecost, Things to Come, pp. 277-78.

⁴Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 209.

tribulation at verse 9. This is adopted by Chafer¹ and Armerding.² Pentecost himself chooses the second option in which the present age is excluded from the prophecy.³

What is the role of the destruction of Jerusalem in the eschatological approach? Walvoord and others claim that in the first Gospel, Matthew does not present Jesus as addressing that event after 24:2. While the disciples ask for the time of the temple's destruction (24:3), Jesus does not answer it in Matthew.⁴ In Burnett's understanding, the disciples' question in 24:3, "when shall these things be (ταῦτα ἔσται) . . . ," has reference not to the destruction of the temple but to the Parousia events due to the decisive caesura between verses 2 and 3.⁵ For Walvoord the question about the destruction of the temple is asked but not answered; for Burnett it is never asked.

Others within the eschatological and dispensational framework protest such reasoning. "Why would Matthew

¹Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, 8 vols. (reprint ed., Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 5:120-25.

²Carl Armerding, The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24-25 and Other Studies (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Co., 1955), pp. 14-17.

³Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 278; cf. also Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 80.

⁴Walvoord, Matthew, p. 182; Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, p. 435; Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 276.

⁵Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, pp. 206-7.

include the first question of the disciples and then leave the answer unrecorded? If the second question is answered, how can one with consistent logic contend that in Matthew the first is not?"¹ So the solution may be to see Christ answering the question of the destruction of the temple specifically in the signs of 24:4-8,² or generally in the Discourse as He separates the two events by an indefinite period of time.³ In the latter case, Jesus would be separating (perhaps by prophetic perspective) what the disciples had united.

The eschatological approach which sees little or no reference to the historical fall of Jerusalem, has been identified almost exclusively with dispensationalism.⁴ Carson seems to make this identification.⁵ But the key issue for distinguishing a dispensational interpretation of the Olivet Discourse is not simply its eschatological approach but its belief that the church is not in view in the 24:4-31 passage. Carson lists what he considers four "insuperable" objections to the dispensational handling of

¹Toussaint, Matthew, p. 268.

²W. K. Price, Jesus' Prophetic Sermon: The Olivet Key to Israel, the Church, and the Nations (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), p. 47.

³Toussaint, Matthew, pp. 269-70.

⁴See note 2, p. 39.

⁵Carson, "Matthew," pp. 494-95.

the passage.¹ His objections are worth evaluation. But it should be noted that only one deals precisely with the dispensational distinction that the church is absent from the Discourse.

Carson mistakenly identifies dispensationalism with those who believe that Jesus did not answer the question of the disciples about the destruction of the temple (24:3). He objects that if dispensationalism is correct, Jesus' answer is almost deceptive to his hearers. For while they asked about the destruction fulfilled in A.D. 70, dispensationalists have Jesus answering with a description of a future destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, for dispensationalists, Jesus did not attempt to answer their question nor did He attempt to correct their understanding.² This may be answered in several ways: 1) it should be noted as discussed above, that not all dispensationalists³ believe that Jesus answered only the second question of the disciples and not the first. That is to say, this view of 24:3

¹It is interesting to note that in Carson's introductory remarks concerning the dispensational approach, he admits, "If dispensationalism were unambiguously defined elsewhere in Scripture, then the least to be said for its interpretation of chapter 24 is that it is self-consistent and makes sense of the time indicators (e.g. 'immediately after the tribulation of those days,' v. 39, etc.)"; Ibid., p. 494.

²Ibid., p. 495. His objections are not given here according to his order.

³Price and Toussaint are dispensational.

is not essential to dispensationalism;¹ 2) those who suggest that the question about the destruction of the temple was not answered by Jesus in Matthew, state clearly that in Luke Jesus does answer the first question.² Thus, in reality, the question of the disciples would have been answered on the historical occasion at which it was given; and 3) it is incorrect to say that the disciples asked about the A.D. 70 event. This begs the question. It may be, as will be seen at the discussion of 24:3, that the disciples themselves envisioned a destruction of the city which closely preceded the Parousia; i.e., they were asking about a destruction of the city which in the unfolding of history has proven to be not the A.D. 70 destruction, but a yet future event which the former typifies.

In a second objection, Carson argues that a dispensational (eschatological) interpretation rests heavily on Matthew's account and overlooks the contribution of the other synoptics.³ But even in Carson's view, after verse 29 or at least at verse 36, the A.D. 70 event has been set aside and eschatology becomes the only concern for the rest of the Discourse.⁴ Nevertheless, this objection, as well

¹Cf. Tasker, *Matthew*, p. 228, who holds that the second question is unanswered. He, of course, is not dispensational.

²For references, see note 4, p. 41.

³Carson, "Matthew," pp. 494-95.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 504ff., 507ff.

as a third objection that the dispensational position forces the interpreter to adopt an unlikely meaning of "this generation" (24:34),¹ can only be answered in an examination of the text.

The only objection offered that relates precisely to dispensationalism is his objection to interpreting the disciples as representative of Jews in the tribulation rather than of members of the church. He carefully states, "Here, before the Passion, Jesus is not addressing the church, in its post-Pentecost sense; but he is addressing, not his Jewish opponents, but his Jewish disciples who will constitute the church" [original emphasis].² This whole issue will be addressed in Chapter IV.³ But it may be observed at this point that just as Carson states, Jesus is not addressing the disciples as members of the post-Pentecost church. Jesus does so in the Upper Room Discourse, but not in the Olivet Discourse. It is also true as Carson writes, that Jesus is addressing the Jewish disciples who will constitute the church. Neither of these facts refute the dispensational contention that the believers represented by the Jewish disciples may be tribulation saints, not church saints. For every time Jesus addressed the disciples, He

¹Ibid., pp. 494-95.

²Ibid., p. 495.

³N.B. pp. 114ff.

was addressing disciples who would become members of the church, including His instruction, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles . . . , but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5,6). Yet this command, given to the disciples, does not obligate the members of the body of Christ. The real question is, will the church be in existence on the earth when the predictions of the prophecies are fulfilled?

Conclusion

A wide spectrum of views exists concerning the chronology of Matthew 24:1-44. Literary devices, such as counting the syllables in the text or discovering chiastic arrangements, must be relegated to secondary steps of exegesis next to the primary task of determining the grammatical-historical-theological meaning.

Those who do analyze the text according to grammatical-historical-theological methods also differ in their conclusions. A pure historical approach denies an eschatological emphasis to 24:4-31 or 4-35. Fulfillment of prophecies in these verses is found in the first century invasion and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the Romans. Interpreting the prophecy as having relevance for both the destruction of Jerusalem and the future Parousia leads to one form or other of the historical-eschatological approach. For some expositors with this understanding, the

two events are so intertwined at times as to be indistinguishable in the text. Prophetic foreshortening or typology may explain the difficulty. Other interpreters posit that the two events are distinguishable in the text, most commonly at the supposed gap between verse 28 and verse 29. This time gap has been explained by prophetic foreshortening as well. Therefore, an extended period of time exists between the two events. The Discourse allows for this but the gap itself (the interadvent age) is not specifically mentioned or predicted. Only a few scholars feel this time gap in the Discourse may be explained by a conditional element which was not fulfilled in the first century but could or will be fulfilled at the events of the Parousia.

The historical-eschatological approach also includes those who understand the Discourse as a prophecy of the interadvent period in which the A.D. 70 siege of Jerusalem plays a central role. No time gap is intended in the prophecy.

Finally, the eschatological approach interprets from 24:15 or earlier to refer exclusively to the future. By and large, dispensationalists fit into this scheme. In Matthew, the destruction of Jerusalem may be briefly mentioned or excluded altogether. But the crucial factor for a dispensational understanding of the Discourse is not merely its eschatological interpretation, but the fact that it interprets the passage to refer to a future tribulation

in which church saints are excluded.

The conclusion of this chapter is that some form of eschatological approach seems to do the most justice to the text. First, it maintains the unity of the Discourse and the united time period seemingly depicted in verses 4-28. Second, it avoids placing an extended time gap between verse 28 and verse 29. While prophetic foreshortening is likely in other prophetic passages outside the Olivet Discourse, the chronological indicators of verse 29 tend to prevent the conception here. Third, the unusual interpretation of verses 29-31 as fulfilled at the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem becomes an unnecessary expedient. One purpose of this approach is to retain the unity of the Olivet prophecy, but the eschatological understanding also retains this unity. Fourth, the eschatological approach cannot be charged with a total disconnection of Matthew 24:4-44 from the A.D. 70 judgment on Jerusalem. It may be, however, that for the Matthean presentation, the A.D. 70 event is a generic fulfillment or typological.

CHAPTER III

THE CONTEXT AND SETTING OF MATTHEW 24

The design of this chapter is to determine the precise starting and ending point of the Olivet Discourse. With these limits, the previous context of the Discourse can be examined for its contributions to an understanding of the Discourse.

The Structure of Matthew

Carson notes three basic schemes for the structure of the First Gospel: a geographical framework; a structure related to the ἀπὸ τότε phrase at 4:17 and 16:21 yielding a threefold division; and a basic division founded upon the formula used five times in Matthew, "Now it came about when Jesus had finished these words . . ." (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).¹ To this may be added chiastic structures and loose structures developed topically or thematically in a similar fashion to a geographical framework.

It is well known that Matthew brings order and precision to his Gospel.² Either a geographical or a

¹Carson, "Matthew," pp. 50-51.

²Ellis calls the author "meticulous Matthew," suggesting his precision is similar to the precision of a

topical/thematic division of the book does not appear to adequately handle Matthew's exactness. The remaining three schemes--a threefold division hinging on the ἀπὸ τότε phrase, the fivefold formula, and chiastic arrangements--all seem to fit the Matthean tendency toward orderly arrangement.

Kingsbury is perhaps the foremost proponent of the ἀπὸ τότε structural arrangement. He argues that this fixed formula is the linchpin that holds together the three divisions of the book.¹ But it is questionable whether two uses of a phrase constitutes a technical form around which the First Gospel is constructed.² The ἀπὸ τότε also appears in Matthew 26:16, but no major division of the book is discovered here.³

Swiss watch; Peter F. Ellis, Matthew: His Mind and Message (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1974), p. 19; cf. also Donald Senior, What Are They Saying About Matthew? (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 22. One example is the orderly arrangement of the genealogy of chapter one which strikes the reader almost immediately.

¹J. D. Kingsbury, "Form and Message of Matthew," Int 29 (1975):18; idem, Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 8-9.

²Senior, Matthew?, p. 25.

³Ibid.; Carson, "Matthew," p. 50. To be exact, the phrase found in 4:17 and 16:21 is ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο. The verb is not found in 26:16. This does not invalidate the point of Senior (note 2 above), for "if Matthew wanted to give such importance to these two verses in his Gospel, is it likely that he would pen a very similar expression in 26:16?"; Senior, Matthew?, p. 25. Matthew 26:74 could be added as another passage that parallels these already

Chiastic structures in Matthew are quite common¹ and understandable in light of his precision. But chiasm does not finally decide the issue of structure and division in Matthew. Part of the reason for this is that literary forms must be validated by grammatical-historical-theological concerns. This is evident from the fact that chiasmus has been developed around both Kingsbury's twice-used formula² as well as around either a position that Matthew contains five major discourses³ or seven major discourses.⁴ This variety of approaches to chiasmus renders it suspect as the final determinative key to Matthew's structure.

What does seem in concord with Matthew's style of exactness is the fivefold formula appearing at the conclusion of each major discourse (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). In each case, the words appear, "Now it came about when Jesus had finished [these words, these parables, etc.]

given. Its phraseology is τότε ἤρξατο, omitting the ἀπό. No major division is claimed here, either.

¹Chiasmus is seen in the Sermon on the Mount by Michael D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), pp. 250-69; for chiasmus throughout the entire Gospel, see Ellis, *Matthew*, pp. 10-13; J. C. Fenton, "Inclusio and Chiasmus in Matthew," *SE IV* (1957):174-79.

²Tommy B. Slater, "Notes on Matthew's Structure," *JBL* 99 (1980):436.

³C. H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *CBQ* 26 (1961):427-30.

⁴H. B. Green, "The Structure of St. Matthew's Gospel," *SE IV* (1965):48.

. . ." (καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς . . .). Kingsbury lists two objections which he feels proves fatal for this position: 1) with this format, the infancy narrative and the Passion/resurrection narrative are relegated to a prologue and epilogue, outside the main body of the book; and 2) chapter 11 and chapter 23 may constitute two additional discourses to arrive at seven rather than five great discourses.¹ Carson answers both objections. Concerning the first objection, he notes that there is really no difficulty in viewing the infancy narrative as a prologue. But Matthew 26-28 may constitute an "exceptional sixth narrative section with corresponding teaching section being laid on the shoulders of the disciples (28:18-20)."² Concerning the second objection, he responds by noting that the arrangement of the five narrative-discourse units does not exclude the possibility that Jesus could be depicted as speaking within the narrative itself.³

Senior adds the question as to whether the fivefold fixed statement is, after all, a concluding formula to the discourses. Could it not be a transitional statement?⁴ But arguments concerning the nature of the formula do not

¹Kingsbury, "Matthew," p. 17.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 17.

³Ibid.

⁴Senior, Matthew?, pp. 21-22.

negate the fact that the Book's division is best aligned with it. As will be seen later, Matthew brings an amazing array of distinctive terminology to begin five discourses.¹ This evidence harmonizes with the evidence for the concluding or transitional formula, making the fivefold narrative-discourse structure a very strong structural clue indeed.²

This fivefold narrative-discourse arrangement which closes with the formula "Now it came about when Jesus had finished . . ." (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), means that the Olivet Discourse falls within the unit beginning with narrative in 19:3 and concluding with the formula at 26:1. But where does this fifth discourse begin--21:23, 23:1, 24:1 or 24:3-4?

¹Terence J. Keegan, "Introductory Formulas for Matthean Discourses," CBQ 44 (1982):422-23.

²Some have seen this arrangement modeled after the Pentateuch, with Jesus presented as the "new Moses"; B. W. Bacon, "The 'Five Books' of Moses Against the Jews," Exp 15 (1918):55-66; Idem, Studies in Matthew (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), pp. 80-90. For a revived attempt, see Philippe Rolland, "From the Genesis to the End of the World: The Plan of Matthew's Gospel," BTB 2 (1972):170-76. This added feature to the narrative-discourse pattern is to be set aside in light of the fact that the Moses typology is hardly a major concern for Matthew and any correspondence between Matthew and the Pentateuch is quite weak; Carson, "Matthew," p. 50. For a thorough critique of these issues, consult W. D. Davies, The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), pp. 14-108. Nevertheless, the fivefold arrangement had become customary in Jewish literature, probably due to the pattern and authority of the Pentateuch; Robert H. Gundry, Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 10, 11.

The Starting Point of the Discourse

Brown is one who wishes to see 21:23-25:46 as a discourse unit. He writes:

Matt 21:23-25:46 is actually a single bipartite discourse. The characteristic formula with which Matthew concludes his discourses (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1) occurs in 26:1 but not after the Woes against the Pharisees. Furthermore, Matthew has omitted the Widow's Mite (Mk 12:41-44), so that the Lament over Jerusalem (23:37-39) is followed immediately by the Prediction of the Destruction of the Temple (24:1-3). The two parts of Matthew's final discourse are introduced, respectively, by Jesus entering the temple (21:23) and leaving it (24:1).¹

Brown's last statement may actually work against his view. As Keegan suggests, the references to Jesus entering (21:23) and leaving the temple (24:1) may more plausibly form an inclusion that marks the end of the 21:23-24:2 unit.² At the same time hinting at the use of προσῆλθον as part of the inclusion, he concludes:

At the beginning of this section (21:23) Jesus goes into the temple and the [aorist] indicative of proserchomai [προσῆλθον] is used with the chief priests and elders who come and challenge his authority. At the end (24:1) Jesus comes out of the temple, and the disciples come [προσῆλθον] and marvel at the strength of institutional Judaism.³

In fact, Keegan has made a study of Matthew's distinctive terminology used to begin his discourse. This varied but distinctive terminology is found at the beginning

¹Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," pp. 19-20.

²Keegan, "Introductory Formulas," p. 422.

³Ibid., p. 423.

of the five major discourses (5:1,2; 9:36,37; 13:1-3; 18:1-3; 24:3-4) and in a few other places, but not at any other location often included as another discourse or section of a discourse (e.g. 21:23, 23:1 or 24:1).¹ He observes that 24:3-4 includes the Matthean introductory formulae of 1) Jesus sitting on the mountain (cf. 5:1; 13:1 [sitting by the sea]) and 2) the disciples approaching Jesus (cf. 5:1). His conclusion, with which the writer concurs, is that Matthew 24:3-4 begins a major discourse in light of, first, the convergence of this distinctive terminology and, second, the change of location mentioned in 24:3.²

When Matthew mentions that the disciples come to Jesus, he is not only using a phrase from his introductory formulae, but he has made a clear change of audience. This, too, marks off chapter 23 from the discourse of chapter 24.³ Even the introduction of a basically new theme in the first use of *napovola* reflects a break in the material. "It does seem that Matthew intends chapter 23 to be read as a separate discourse, but it also seems that the Evangelist

¹Ibid., pp. 428-29.

²Ibid., p. 423. Only in the so-called "central discourse" does another discourse have a change of location within the discourse itself (13:36). But this may be viewed as unique to Matthew 13 and quite purposeful if this chapter is recognized as the pivotal point in the Gospel and the tip of a chiastic structure; Ibid.

³Carson, "Matthew," p. 469; Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 21.

intends chapter 23 to provide the transition to the discourse in chapter 24."¹

Matthew 23:29-39

Matthew 23:29-36

Matthew 23 forms an important climax to the preceding confrontations of Jesus with the Jewish leaders.² The condemnation of these unbelieving scribes and Pharisees sets the stage for Jesus' judgment of Jerusalem itself (23:37-39). Turning to the crowds, Jesus warns them not to follow the pattern of their Jewish teachers and leaders (23:1-12). But on the leaders themselves, He pronounces seven woe judgments (23:13-36) culminating in a condemnation of "this generation" (23:36) for their identification with those of past history who killed the prophets and for their harsh treatment of those who would be sent by Christ (23:31-36). The seventh woe judgment (23:29-30) merges with an emphatic accusation that the scribes and Pharisees share in the guilt of their forefathers (v. 31). An ironic imperative³ follows (v. 32) in which the Jewish leaders are directed to complete the full measure of the sins of their

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 22-23; Carson, "Matthew," p. 469.

³Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 315; Gundry, Matthew, p. 468. The majority and critical texts have the imperative; B has the future indicative and D has the aorist indicative.

predecessors. This will be accomplished as the Jewish leaders persecute and put to death the emissaries Jesus Himself (ἐγώ, v. 34) will send. The purpose of this commission does not seem to be conversion only, at least initially, but in order that (ὅπως, v. 35) "upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth . . ." (v. 35).¹

What seems clear in these verses is that the Jewish leaders become representative of the Jewish nation as a whole. Verses 32-36 begin the transition until in verses 37-39 the whole nation is perspicuously in view. Lambrecht's opinion is that the scribes and the Pharisees form "an undifferentiated unity" that represents the guilty Israel of Jesus' time up to A.D. 70, just as the term "Jerusalem" (v. 37) stands for the guilty nation. Jesus has naturally passed from "scribes and Pharisees" (v. 29) to "this generation" (v. 36) to "Jerusalem, who kills the prophets" (v. 37).² This is certainly true. In Jesus' stated desire to gather Jerusalem and her children, He is by metonymy addressing the nation, that is, all Jews.³ Evidence to this fact is also seen in a change of number from singular to plural: "your children" (τὰ τέκνα σου, v. 37) to the plural "you were unwilling" (ἠθελήσατε, v.

¹Cf. Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 4.

²Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," pp. 315-16.

³Carson, "Matthew," p. 487; Brown, "Apocalypse," p. 4; Toussaint, Matthew, p. 265.

37) and "your house" (ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν, v. 38).¹ So it is reasonable to understand the words of Jesus as declaring judgment upon "this generation" (v. 36), and not the Jewish leaders alone.

But one crucial question needs to be addressed before passing to Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, viz., does "this generation" imply, as Lambrecht suggests, the Israel of Jesus' time up until A.D. 70? Hare helps answer the question indirectly:

Although the Pharisaic opponents are made primarily responsible for Israel's rejection of Jesus and his messengers, they simply incarnate the spirit of apostasy which has characterized Israel throughout her history. Thus, the condemnation of the Pharisees in the seventh woe shades almost imperceptibly into a condemnation of the people as a whole, symbolized by "this generation."²

Hare may have in mind only the past history of Israel. But the prophetic Scriptures declare Israel (apart from a remnant) will be characterized by apostasy up to the Second Coming (Dan 12:7; Zech 13:8,9; the "many" of Dan 9:27; Hos 5:15; Matt 23:39). Does "this generation" somehow symbolize the Jewish nation up to the Parousia? Burnett thinks so. For him, "this generation" refers not only to the Jews living at that time who reject Jesus, but also all their descendants until the coming of Christ who like them reject

¹Cf. Carson, "Matthew," p. 486.

²Douglas R. A. Hare, Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), pp. 151-52.

Jesus' disciples (cf. 25:31-46). Therefore, all unbelieving Israel is in view.¹

If "this generation" is solely limited to the A.D. 30-70 era, then only those contemporaries of Christ "filled up the measure of the guilt of their fathers" (cf. v. 32). But is this correct? A look at 1 Thessalonians 2:16 may solve the dilemma. There Paul declared in words similar to Christ's that the Jews "always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost" (1 Thess 2:16). Paul's latter phrase concerning wrath assists in the interpretation of Paul's former phrase about filling up the measure of sins. Even pretribulationists have taken the "wrath" of 1 Thessalonians 2:16 to be prophetic of A.D. 70,² but this is questionable if not improbable. "Wrath" in 1 Thessalonians also appears in 1:10 and 5:9 where it is best understood contextually as a reference to the "birth pangs" of the day of the Lord and not a reference to hell³ or the destruction of Jerusalem. Even the phrase "to the utmost" (εἰς τέλος) is used elsewhere to mean "to the end, until the end."⁴ Several themes from the Matthew 23-24

¹Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, pp. 60-61.

²D. Edmond Hiebert, The Thessalonian Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 120.

³Hodges, "1 Thessalonians 5:1-11," pp. 70-71.

⁴BAGD, p. 813 cites Matthew 24:13 as well as others with this meaning.

context converge with 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16: 1) a tribulation wrath which comes upon the Jews (yet to be demonstrated from Matthew 24); 2) two nearly identical statements about the Jews filling up the measure of their sins; 3) the interrelationship of this "filling up of the measure of sins" with the murder of Jesus and the prophets (Matt 23:31, 34,37; 1 Thess 2:15); and 4) the subject of the end (τέλος, Matt 24:3,6,14; 1 Thess 2:16). Thus, the sentence, "all these things shall come upon this generation," may suggest the end-time Jewish generation which is typified by that first-century generation.¹

Lament Over Jerusalem (23:37-39)

Immediately preceding the setting for the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6), Matthew records Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. Mark and Luke, however, record the incident of the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4). Fuller argues that Matthew, in distinction from Luke's record (Luke 13:34-36), may be chronologically correct in placing the lament over Jerusalem between the Olivet Discourse and the woe judgments against the scribes and Pharisees. The very definiteness of the lament

¹Hendriksen finds the OT background for Jesus' commission of the prophets (Matt 23:34) in Jer 7:25-29; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 836. Interestingly, Jer 7:29c says, "For the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath." It may be that the day of the Lord is the ultimate day of "this generation" (cf. 7:32-34).

("Behold, your house is being left to you desolate") suggests that the Matthew 23 setting is quite natural. Consequently, the lament pericope in Matthew forms a good chronological and logical introduction to the Discourse of Matthew 24.¹

Since these are the last recorded public words of Jesus,² it would be quite surprising, though not impossible, if there would be no eschatological teaching within them. On the contrary, an eschatological perspective clearly emerges. In the first place, Jesus' lament reveals His persistent desire in the past and in the present (ποσάκις, v. 37)³ to gather Israel (ἐπισυναγαγεῖν) under His protective wing. One can see a distinct harmony with the pre-millennial worldwide gathering of Israel so frequently mentioned in the OT (Deut 30:1-5; Isa 11:11,12; 27:12; 43:5-7; Jer 16:14,15; 23:4; 31:7-9; Ezek 11:17; 36:24; Zeph 3:18-20). The verse speaks of the final regathering of the Jews to their land.⁴ But the Jewish nation rejected the

¹Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 4-5.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 486.

³While Carson prefers to limit ποσάκις ("how often . . . ?," v. 31) to Christ's earthly ministry (Ibid., p. 487), Alford is assuredly right in seeing Christ's pre-incarnate OT work as well; Alford, Four Gospels, p. 234; Burnett suggests that in ποσάκις, Matthew views Jesus as pre-existent Wisdom as well as Wisdom incarnate; Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 67.

⁴Chafer, Systematic Theology, 5:116-17.

very One who could regather them. McNeile cites Isaiah 31:5 as the OT background for Matthew 23:37, both of which imply protection from future judgment.¹ If the Isaiah 31 passage addresses an eschatological event, as it most likely does, then the verse serves as further support for this premillennial understanding of Matthew 23:37. Isaiah 31:4d-6 reads:

So will the Lord of hosts come down to wage war on Mount Zion and on its hill. Like flying birds so the Lord of hosts will protect Jerusalem. He will protect and deliver it. . . . Return to Him from whom you have deeply defected, O sons of Israel.

As a result of the nation's refusal to be regathered, their "house" will become desolate (v. 38). The Jewish "house" (οἶκος) could be a reference to the temple,² the city of Jerusalem,³ the city with the temple as its center,⁴ the Jewish people themselves,⁵ or a unity of all three without the need to distinguish precisely.⁶ Some

¹McNeile, Matthew, pp. 341-42.

²Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 6; Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 316; Toussaint, Matthew, p. 265; Gundry, Matthew, p. 473.

³Broadus, Matthew, p. 478; Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 286.

⁴McNeile, Matthew, p. 342; Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 840.

⁵Francis D. Weinert, "Luke, the Temple and Jesus' Saying About Jerusalem's Abandoned House," CBQ 44 (1982): 75.

⁶Carson, "Matthew," p. 487.

combination of all three does seem appropriate. The temple is primarily in view in the following verses (24:1,3; cf. also 23:35). But the city of Jerusalem is mentioned (v. 37) and the nation will not see their Messiah until they repent (v. 39). All three will be left to judgment.¹ Jesus now abandons the temple, perhaps as Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:23),² or as the Shekinah of God.³

But the abandonment of the people of Israel cannot be viewed as permanent, as verse 39 confirms. In this verse we find additional eschatological background to the Olivet Discourse. Brown appeals to the parallel passage in Luke 13:34,35 where the adversative δέ "suggests that the forsaking of Jerusalem's house will be offset some day by Israel's conversion. . . ." ⁴ He does state, however, that the use of Psalm 118:26⁵ quoted in this verse does not necessarily imply this.⁶ Others push this point, perhaps in

¹There are some textual problems with ἔρημος, but its inclusion has firm footing. Abandonment is implied, even if the word is not original. For arguments that support its inclusion, see Gundry, Matthew, p. 473; Carson, "Matthew," p. 487.

²D. E. Garland, The Intention of Matthew 23 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), pp. 202-3.

³Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 67.

⁴Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 6.

⁵For some background to Ps 118:26, see Carson, "Matthew," p. 439.

⁶Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 6.

an attempt to deny a future repentance for Israel. The usual suggestion is that all men will proclaim, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," even the unbelievers who thereby acknowledge their Judge and King.¹

Several factors argue for a future conversion of Israel in this verse. The OT and NT clearly describe a repentance of Israel which precedes the return of Christ (Hos 5:15-6:3; Zech 12:10; Jer 3:11-18; Joel 2:28-32; Rom 11:25-27).² Matthew 23:39 fits this scheme quite well. The "coming" of the "Blessed One" can be none other than Jesus and the Parousia mentioned more specifically in 24:3. This is confirmed by the ἀπ' ἄρτι ("from now on," 23:39) phrase not found in the other Synoptics, but important to Matthean eschatology.³ Here it is introduced for the first of three times (elsewhere, 26:29,64). Each occurrence has reference to the Parousia.⁴ Israel will not physically see their Messiah until (ἕως ἄν) they call out to Him in faith. The very wording presupposes the acknowledgment of Christ

¹Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 841; cf. Broadus, Matthew, p. 478, who allows for many Jews to be included; and Carson, "Matthew," pp. 487-88, who says that Ps 118 may leave open the option of acknowledging the coming King with faith.

²Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 73.

³David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible Commentary, eds. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 316.

⁴Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 78.

before His return. Feinberg is correct when he states, "The return of Christ is signaled by an acceptance of their Messiah rather than a signal for the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ [original emphasis]."¹

Masters makes a significant point drawn from the similar use of Psalm 118:26 in the triumphal entry recognition of Jesus by the Jewish nation in Matthew 21:9:

In the same way that the praises of the triumphal entry were particularly designed to be public, and just as individualized private recognition of Jesus did not serve God's purpose then, the future recognition of Jesus by Jerusalem must be similarly public. A national acceptance of Jesus therefore seems necessary to fulfill His words.²

It may be concluded that the 23:29-39 unit prepares the way for an eschatological emphasis in the Olivet Discourse and cannot be said to portray only an A.D. 70 outlook.³

¹Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 73; cf. also Toussaint, Matthew, pp. 265-66; Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, pp. 212-15; Rand, "Olivet Discourse," p. 108; Pentecost, Things to Come, pp. 298-99.

²Mary Ann Masters, "Jerusalem in the Eschatology of Jesus" (M.A. thesis, Wheaton College, 1972), p. 13.

³It is fascinating that the Holy Spirit through Matthew uses characteristic participles in the lament over Jerusalem, ἡ αποκτείνουσα τοὺς προφῆτας καὶ λιθοβολοῦσα κ.τ.λ. (23:37). The two eschatological witnesses of Revelation, who are also prophets (11:3,6) meet their death in Jerusalem (12:8).

The Setting of the Discourse (Matt 24:1-2)

Matthew 24:1-2

As Jesus leaves the temple¹ for the last time, He graphically predicts its destruction. Woolery stresses the fact that this setting with regard to Herod's temple must be allowed to help interpret the following Discourse. He reasons:

Therefore, whatever eschatological meaning or schema is derived from the discourse, one may never legitimately depreciate the historical concreteness of the text. If there is eschatology in the Olivet Discourse, then it must be understood in direct relation to Herod's temple and its destruction in A.D. 70.²

Elsewhere, he criticizes dispensationalists for interpreting the Discourse in such a way that it has no real connection with the first century temple. In his opinion, the disciples think of Herod's temple while dispensationalists make Jesus' answer deal only with a tribulation temple.³

This perspective may rely too heavily upon the parallel accounts (especially Luke who is thought to have an historical perspective) and may overlook Matthew's decisive stress on Jesus' departure from the temple (24:1).⁴

¹For a summary of the Lord's teaching concerning the temple in Matthew, see Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 58-59.

²Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 1. Since this statement is found so early in his dissertation, one could assume this to be a firm presupposition to his study.

³Ibid., pp. 137-38.

⁴See p. 67, note 3.

Beginning with 24:4, there is no apparent break in the Olivet Discourse. If Herod's temple and the A.D. 70 destruction form the interpretive key to 24:4-31, then this temple and destruction must also be the interpretive key to 24:32-25:46. But the Discourse clearly ends with the eschatological concerns of Christ's Second Coming. "To refer the closing passage [25:31-46] to the destruction of Jerusalem is absurd and impossible."¹ Thus, it is not adequate to state simply that Herod's temple forms the setting and context for the Discourse.

In fact, Matthew may link 24:1-2 more with the lament over Jerusalem than with the subsequent material of 24:4-44. Several lines of evidence lead to this conclusion. First, it has already been seen that 24:3-4 mark the starting point of the Discourse and break some (but not all) of the continuity with 24:1-2.² The Discourse is not delivered at the first-century temple but on the Mount of Olives.³

¹Broadus, *Matthew*, p. 479. Woolery himself moves from the A.D. 70 event in interpretation at 24:29; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 50.

²See pp. 54-56.

³The majority text has the disciples approaching Jesus as He is leaving the temple (καὶ ἐξελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐπορεύετο ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ), not after He leaves as in the critical text (καὶ ἐξελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐπορεύετο). In either case, Matthew stresses the departure. But the majority text seems to lay greater stress on this fact and harmonizes with the other Gospels which relate that the disciples came to Jesus while He was leaving

Second, Matthew places a unique emphasis on Jesus' departure from the temple (24:1).¹ He also omits the story of the widow's mite (Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6) which allows the 24:1-2 predictions to join with the 23:38 announcement.² The abandonment of the temple in verse 38 is a personal abandonment by Jesus³ as seems evident in the γάρ of verse 39 (cf. also the emphatic με). The Shekinah of God (Jesus) is leaving the Jewish temple. Many see Luke as centering upon the historical, and Matthew (or Matthew and Mark) upon the eschatological.⁴ Could it be that in Matthew's stress on Jesus' departure from Herod's temple, he is signaling his readers that his subject will depart from that temple also?

Third, when Jesus said, "Do you not see all these

(Mark 13:1; Luke 21:5). Using the critical text, Lambrecht wrongly implies the Synoptics contradict one another; Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 314.

¹Matthew 24:1 may be connected with Ezek 11:23 where the departure of the glory of God is depicted as going up and resting on the mountain on the east of the city. The mountain is clearly the Mount of Olives; Klaus Baltzer, "The Meaning of the Temple in the Lukan Writings," HTR 58 (1965):267, 273.

²Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 314.

³Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 6, who sees in 24:1 a prophetic gesture finalized in Christ's death. However, the withdrawal of God's presence from the temple in all Jewish tradition meant the destruction of Jerusalem. The whole nation would also become unholy and doomed to destruction; Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, pp. 71-72.

⁴McNeile, Matthew, pp. 343-44; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 12; et al.

things?" (24:2), it is not at all certain that the physical buildings of Herod's temple are the primary reference in Matthew.¹ βλέπω can be used of mental perception² and the πάντα ταῦτα is used consistently in the Discourse of the catastrophes of coming judgment³ and Christ's return. Jesus may be asking the disciples rhetorically,⁴ "You do understand all these things I have said about judgment on Israel and the temple, and concerning My return, don't you?" If this is the meaning of the question, Jesus is not so much pointing out the temple buildings⁵ as He is the significance of all His previous announcements and how they effect the temple. For Jesus as God-incarnate to depart from the temple, meant judgment on the temple and the city. After Jesus' rhetorical question, the disciples apparently understand His prophecy more fully. This seems evident

¹Mark 13:2 specifically mentions the buildings.

²BAGD, p. 143.

³Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 317, note 19; Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 156.

⁴The οὐ implies a positive answer. Jesus' question assumes the disciples would answer Yes, even though He knows they do not fully comprehend what He has said (in chapter 23); cf. Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 58.

⁵πάντα ταῦτα is neuter and may not point to the temple buildings (feminine). On the other hand, Bruce thinks it refers to the splendor of the buildings; Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 288. Carson says the demonstrative pronoun does take an irregular antecedent at times; Carson, "Matthew," p. 496. The grammar itself cannot be the final determining factor.

from their subsequent question (24:3). They perceive that these judgments usher in the consummation of the age.

One final matter deserves comment. Although it is almost universally held that the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem fulfills Jesus' prediction in 24:2, is this the only possibility? Jesus left the temple complex (ἱερόν) and not merely the sanctuary (ναός).¹ Yet as He looked at the temple area, He pronounced a destruction with the most emphatic definiteness: not one stone was to be left upon another. Fuller agrees that the phrase "stone upon stone," "eliminates all possible misconceptions about the extent of the detailed destruction."² He also affirms that the fulfillment came in A.D. 70.³

But many are quick to admit that the "Wailing Wall," part of the western wall of the first-century temple precinct, still remains untoppled.⁴ Keist feels that the ἱερόν includes these present archaeological remains and the

¹For this distinction, cf. Ibid.; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 58.

²Ibid., p. 60.

³Ibid.

⁴Archaeologist Benjamin Mazar writes, "The lower layers of the walls of the Temple Mount also survived at various heights, but this was not by design. Rather, they were so massive and so solidly built that they proved almost indestructible--thereby providing one of the major finds of the present excavations." Benjamin Mazar, The Mountain of the Lord (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975), p. 92.

prophecy stands unfulfilled.¹ But several commentators object that this does not constitute a lack of fulfillment. Gould writes of Jesus' prediction, "This is a rhetorical statement of utter destruction. It would not be a nonfulfillment of this prophecy to find parts of the original structure still standing."² Broadus marvels at how literally the prophecy was fulfilled, then warns against strict literalism in light of these remains.³ Walvoord contends that the Wailing Wall was only part of the outer buildings and not part of the main structure.⁴ McNeile states that the prediction was general since the actual destruction of Jerusalem was by fire even though Jesus said the stones would be "cast down."⁵

Perhaps these arguments are valid and the prophecy was fully accomplished. On the other hand, premillennialists have rightly seen the OT to predict a future siege of the city of Jerusalem just before the Second Coming as

¹John Edward Keist, "Interpreting Christ's Prophecy Concerning the Fall of Jerusalem in Matthew 24 and Luke 21" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981), pp. 48, 52. Keist cites class notes from Professor Elliot Johnson of Dallas Seminary in support of his view.

²Ezra P. Gould, The Gospel According to St. Mark, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 242.

³Broadus, Matthew, p. 481.

⁴Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 112.

⁵McNeile, Matthew, p. 343.

prophesied in Zechariah 12:2-3, 14:1-2 and elsewhere.¹

They have also held that a future Tribulation temple will be built² as well as a millennial temple.³ The Tribulation temple must be destroyed before or at the beginning of the millennial kingdom to make way for the new sanctuary. It is possible that a more literal fulfillment of this prophecy concerning the city and temple awaits a future time⁴ while the A.D. 70 event constitutes a generic fulfillment or typological fulfillment.⁵

Excursus: the influence of Daniel

When one speaks of the context of the Olivet Discourse, he usually thinks of the immediately preceding material as discussed above. But the remote context of the Discourse may include other material which forms a

¹Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 80; Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, pp. 230-32; Pentecost, Things to Come, pp. 351, 355.

²John F. Walvoord, "Will Israel Build a Temple in Jerusalem?," BSac 125 (1968):104; T. S. McCall, "How Soon the Tribulation Temple?," BSac 128 (1971):345.

³Walvoord, "Temple in Jerusalem," p. 104; Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 512ff.

⁴The double negative οὐ μὴ, together with the solemn introduction, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, seems to add support for a highly literal fulfillment.

⁵MacDonald holds that in 24:1-3 the historical siege of Jerusalem is merged with a similar siege that occurs in the latter days; William MacDonald, The Gospel of Matthew: Behold Your King (Kansas City: Walterick Publishers, 1974), p. 266; cf. also Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 207.

significant background and influence upon the concepts and thoughts spoken by Jesus. There is little doubt that Matthew 24:15 has Daniel as its background. Jesus Himself says so. But so does much of the rest of the Discourse. Ford rightfully feels that the relationship of the Discourse to the Book of Daniel cannot be over stressed.¹ Jesus includes in the Discourse many if not all of the major themes of Daniel: kingdom, destruction of Jerusalem, temple, Son of Man, tribulation, etc. Therefore, a correct understanding of Daniel is essential to a consistent and accurate interpretation of the Discourse.² Daniel's concern is for the establishment of the kingdom of God. This is portrayed in the theme of the vindication of both God's people and the temple or holy place. In the end times, God will intervene on behalf of His suffering people and set up His kingdom which they inherit as well (7:27). In this way the work of the future Antichrist is reversed. God's elect are delivered and vindicated (cf. Luke 18:1-8).³ The Son of Man prophecy (Dan 7:13,14), the restoration of the holy place (8:14) and the "seventy weeks" of Daniel (9:24-27) "parallel each other and apply to the Messianic

¹Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 112.

²Ibid., pp. 112-13; cf. also John F. Walvoord, Daniel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 13.

³Ford, Abomination of Desolation, pp. 117-19.

kingdom."¹ The only valid conclusion to be drawn from this Daniel-Olivet Discourse relationship is that those interpretations which rely more upon this background must be given greater preference.²

Conclusion

Of all the potential structures of the Book of Matthew, the most sound was discovered to be a division hinging on the concluding or transitional formula of 7:28, 11:1, 13:53; 19:1 and 26:1. The fivefold repetition of the formula is in concord with Matthew's tendency toward precision. The Discourse can be said to end with the close of chapter 25 (25:46). But the Discourse must begin at 24:3,4 and not any earlier. This is shown to be true by 1) the use of distinctive Matthean terminology used in introducing discourses; 2) the inclusion found by Jesus' entrance and withdrawal from the temple at 21:23 and 24:2 marking a division between 24:2 and 3; and 3) the change of location mentioned in 24:3.

The 23:29-39 unit contains much eschatological teaching and cannot be restricted to a prediction of the A.D. 70 event. The Jewish nation as a whole comes into focus. "This generation" may be taken as a reference to

¹Ibid., p. 122.

²Surprisingly, Ford chooses to see the NT as mysticizing and allegorizing the themes of Daniel rather than expanding their admittedly premillennial perspective.

the end-time Jewish generation symbolized by the Jewish nation of Jesus' time. The nature of the judgments described in the context and the similar truths as taught in 1 Thessalonians 2:15,16 point in this direction. The lament over Jerusalem also seems to confirm this. The premillennial regathering of Israel, a future conversion of Israel which is designed to foster hope in light of the judgment on their "house," and the subsequent return of Christ are all clear eschatological emphases.

Finally, the reference to the destruction of the temple cannot be claimed to restrict the Discourse material to the first-century temple. Jesus actually leaves the temple to deliver the Discourse on the Mount of Olives. He also calls upon the disciples, by the use of a rhetorical question, to understand the significance of His prophetic announcements when He said, "You do see all these things, don't you (author's paraphrase)?" "These things" (πάντα ταῦτα) has reference to more than 24:1 and the temple. It picks up the previously mentioned subjects of national judgment and Christ's return (23:32-39). In addition, it is even possible, though not certain, that Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple in 24:1 is yet unfulfilled. A future siege of Jerusalem described in the OT (Zech 14:1-2) may be what Jesus was reiterating. The disciples were shocked at this revelation, not so much because it was new nor so much because Jesus was stating it would

come in their lifetime, but because the temple for the Jew was a uniquely holy place.¹

¹N.B. the Jewish view of the temple in Matt 23:16-18, where the gifts which were given to make the temple beautiful were what made it holy, not the God who had sanctified it; cf. also Luke 21:5. Therefore, to speak against the temple was blasphemous (Matt 26:61; 27:40; Acts 6:13-14; 21:28).

CHAPTER IV

THE BEGINNING AND END OF MESSIANIC

WOES (24:3-14)

Jesus' movement from the temple takes him to the Mount of Olives where the disciples privately (κατ' ἰδίαν) ask Him the question which forms the immediate occasion for the Olivet Discourse (24:3). Jesus' initial response to their question is given in 24:4-14. This chapter will attempt to explain the meaning of the disciples' question, its general relation to the Olivet Discourse as a whole (i.e., did Jesus answer their question directly or indirectly, fully or partially, etc.), and the role of the 24:4-14 unit to the whole Discourse.

The Disciples' Question (24:3)

What did the disciples ask Jesus? Did they have in mind one, two or three questions reflecting a similar number of distinct events? The kind of answer given to this last question may be motivated by the interpretive approach a commentator takes. For example, the eschatological approach is thought to be verified if the disciples ask two or three questions in which the first (regarding the A.D.

70 event) goes unanswered by Christ.¹ Therefore, in Matthew the disciples ask about the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, but Jesus does not answer this question. The eschatological approach can also be substantiated if the disciples asked one unified question which adopted the current Jewish perspective that the end of the world would be immediately preceded by the destruction of Jerusalem. However, Jesus' answer proved this view to be a misunderstanding since the church age was to be a parenthetical gap between the destruction of Jerusalem and the close of history.²

If the disciples mistakenly held to the current Jewish belief of combining the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age, an historical-eschatological approach could be maintained. Thus, Jesus could have corrected the disciples' misunderstanding by describing in the Discourse the long intervening period that would separate the two events.³

Those who interpret the disciples to be correct in uniting into one question the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age may desire to prove an historical-eschatological approach in which the end of the age begins with the A.D. 70 event and reaches through church history

¹E.g. Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 207; Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, p. 435.

²Price, Jesus' Prophetic Sermon, p. 40.

³Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 851.

to the Parousia.¹ This helps avoid a double reference.² The same perspective (the disciples correctly ask one question and the end of the age begins at A.D. 70) may derive from an historical-eschatological approach in which the A.D. 70 event is immediately followed by the Parousia according to prophetic foreshortening.³ Finally, understanding that the disciples asked one unified question is also felt to confirm a strictly historical fulfillment of 24:4-35.⁴ As this makes evident, the exact nature of the disciples' question is crucial to understanding the discourse.

The Form of the Question

Tasker views the question of the disciples as two-fold. But in his opinion, the second "supplementary" question by the disciples is "both irrelevant and unanswerable" since the disciples must be prepared for a final unexpected return of Christ which is preceded by no special signs.⁵ This option is a result of Tasker's approach to the Discourse which parries all eschatological concerns until 24:36

¹Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 302; Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. vii.

²Ibid., p. 68.

³Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 8-12.

⁴J. Marcellus Kik, An Eschatology of Victory (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), p. 86.

⁵Tasker, Matthew, p. 228.

(i.e., an historical approach through 24:35). But the Parousia and the consummation of the age are perspicuously relevant and answerable as the exegesis of the Discourse will reveal.

Walvoord views the disciples' question as a three-fold question. In Matthew, Jesus answers only the second and third question. The first question, which deals with the destruction of the temple, is left unanswered.¹ That Jesus did not answer the first of the disciples' questions, although not held by all dispensationalists, is nevertheless a common dispensational approach.² Rand,³ following Chafer,⁴ claims that the word "sign" should be supplied in the last phrase so that the second and third questions refer to two different signs. The sign of the Parousia is answered in verse 30 and the sign of the "end of the age" is described in verse 15.

If the critical text stands, the perspective of Rand and Chafer is subverted. This is due to the

¹Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 207. Yet in Blessed Hope, p. 87, he states that the second and third question concerning Christ's return and the end of the age are coterminus. He may be implying that only two questions were asked.

²See the discussion under "Eschatological Approach," pp. 39-44.

³Rand, "Olivet Discourse," p. 213.

⁴Chafer, Systematic Theology, 5:119.

application of the Granville Sharp rule of Greek grammar¹ to the phrase, "the sign of Your coming and of the consummation of the age." Therefore, the Parousia and the consummation of the age are a reference to the same event and are identified by one sign. But if the majority text stands, a second article appears (καὶ τῆς συντελείας) making the Granville Sharp rule inapplicable. This would allow for the contention of Rand and Chafer. The disciples were asking for a sign that would identify His future appearance and a sign that the end of history was about to take place. The use of τὸ σημεῖον in verse 30 does seem unavoidably an answer to the question of the disciples for the sign of His coming. But undoubtedly the central force of 24:15 to the 15-28 unit, together with the ὅταν . . . ἴδῃτε ("whenever you see"), makes the abomination of desolation a sign. And if verses 15-28 are eschatological in scope and immediately precede the Parousia (v. 29f.), verse 15 outlines a sign of

¹This grammatical rule states that when a single definite article precedes the first of two nouns or substantives joined by καὶ ("and"), both nouns describe the same event, person, or thing. The rule is usually limited to nouns which 1) have the same gender; 2) are preferably singular in number; 3) are not nouns of essence; 4) are nouns of personal description (when a person is in view); and 5) can logically refer to the same entity. None of the qualifications rules out the application in this passage. Cf. Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," p. 199. For a defense of the Granville Sharp rule, see C. Kuehne, "The Greek Article and the Doctrine of Christ's Deity," *JT* 13 (September 1973):12-28; 13 (December 1973):14-30; 14 (March 1974):11-20; 14 (June 1974):16-25; 14 (September 1974):21-33; 14 (December 1974):8-19; 15 (March 1975):8-22.

the consummation of the age.

While the disciples' question may be divided into three parts, it may be that they saw the answer to their question(s) as a single complex event rather than distinctively separate events.¹ Most commentators agree that in the mind of the disciples, the fall of Jerusalem and the Parousia/consummation of the age were closely associated events.² This was the current Jewish perspective³ and with this the OT prophets coincide (cf. Jer 26:6,9; 7:14,34).⁴ Lambrecht goes so far as to suggest the καὶ could be "emphatic" (epexegetical), combining the double question: "When will these things be, that is, what is the sign of Your coming?"⁵ This tack does not seem necessary. The question of the disciples may simply be looked upon as one question in parallel form.⁶ Broadus comments:

¹Contra Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 86.

²Cranfield, "Mark 13," pp. 195-96; Carson, "Matthew," pp. 495, 497; Summers, "Matthew 24-25," p. 504; Price, Jesus' Prophetic Sermon, p. 40; Geldenhuys, Luke, p. 525.

³Gaston, No Stone on Another, p. 12; Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 191.

⁴Ford, Abomination of Desolation, pp. 67-68; Fuller cites intertestamental literature to the same effect (Testament of Levi 14:1; 15:1; Apocalypse of Baruch 27:1-28:7); Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 69-71.

⁵Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 318; also Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 207.

⁶Gaston, No Stone on Another, p. 12; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 13.

It is not wise to distinguish sharply between the three clauses as if representing three entirely separated points. Evidently the disciples did not separate between his future coming and the end of the present period; nor has the Savior done so in his reply. They also suppose that the destruction of the temple would coincide with his coming and the end of the age; the reply did not clearly show that they would in fact be far apart. . . .¹

This may explain why Mark and Luke do not have the additional phrase of Matthew, "and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age." Mark and Luke implicitly contain these elements in their single question. "If the additional phrase [in Matthew] represented a totally different idea, undoubtedly Mark and Luke would have included it."² In light of these conclusions, the use of ταῦτα ("When will these things be?") could also connote a complex web of events involving the fall of Jerusalem and the Parousia/consummation as simultaneous,³ and not merely the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Were the Disciples Mistaken?

One conclusion that could be gained from this is that the disciples were ignorant and/or mistaken about God's prophetic program.⁴ On the other hand, Fuller who holds

¹Broadus, Matthew, p. 482.

²Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 13.

³Ibid.; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 71-72.

⁴Alford, Four Gospels, p. 235; Edgar M. Wilson, "The Second Coming in the Discourse of the Last Things," PTR 26 (1928):70; Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 14; Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 851; cf. also Robertson, Matthew,

that the disciples were correct in associating the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age,¹ posits a slightly different variation. He cautions us to avoid the a priori assumption that the question of the disciples was directly answered by the Lord. In his opinion, Acts 1:6-8 forms a parallel, for there the disciples' question was answered with what the Lord considered more important than a specific answer to their request. There, as in the Olivet Discourse, the disciples were ignorant of God's prophetic plan.² But if in Matthew the disciples were unenlightened, it is surprising that Jesus did not clearly correct their wrong thinking. He certainly did on other occasions (cf. Matt 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44; 16:1; Luke 24:25, etc.). What appears to handle the evidence more reasonably is the fact that the disciples envisioned the fall of Jerusalem, the end of history and the coming of the Messiah within the same period of time.

This was not the right perspective on the part of the disciples because it was affirmed by the contemporary Jewish belief, but because it was the OT outlook (Zech 12:2-3; 14:1-2). Therefore, the disciples ask about the yet-future fall of Jerusalem and Jesus answers with a

p. 187.

¹Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 93.

²Ibid., pp. 66-67.

description of the yet-future world events, including the invasion of Jerusalem. Masters' words are appropriate:

The disciples' question implies a final destruction of Jerusalem. The disciples clearly thought of the fall of Jerusalem in close connection with the end of the age and the Coming. If they were wrong in this, one would expect Jesus to have made a strict differentiation in the reply, between the fall of Jerusalem and the end. Yet this is not the case. The focus of the discourse is the end and the Coming. The theme of eschatological judgment pervades the discourse. The judgment on Jerusalem is presented as a final judgment on the city and as part of the final world judgment.¹

Thus, Jesus does answer all of the disciples' question.

They, however, ask about an eschatological fall of Jerusalem and end of the age, not a now-historical one.²

The Significance of the Mount of Olives

Since it was Jesus' custom to teach while sitting, and since Luke has no reference to the Mount of Olives,

¹Masters, "Eschatology of Jesus," p. 64.

²At this point, it is appropriate to raise the question as to whether Luke is so highly historical in his outlook as many suppose. All the Synoptics are deeply concerned with the Second Coming of Christ throughout their discourse. It is not at all so certain that the siege mentioned in Luke 21:20 or the times of the Gentiles in 21:24 point to the A.D. 70 event. They are just as closely linked to the Parousia as 21:25-28 makes evident. In Luke 21:24, for example, the city is described as being trodden down (πατούμενη). But the LXX of Zech 12:3 (not in the Hebrew) uses καταπατούμενον, καταπατών. So does Isa 63:17-18 (cf. Arthur W. Wainwright, "Luke and the Restoration of the Kingdom to Israel," *ExpTim* 89 [1977]:77-79). So the siege of Luke 21:20 may be typological. As with the Matthean Discourse, Mark's (13:3-37) and Luke's (21:7-36) Discourse can be viewed eschatologically. None of the Gospel accounts may have a greater stress on the A.D. 70 event than the others.

Fuller thinks no special prophetic significance should be drawn from the fact that the Discourse is given on the Mount of Olives.¹ But in light of Zechariah 14:4, the Mount of Olives is an appropriate location for an eschatological discourse.² It is also the Zechariah passage that predicts an eschatological destruction of Jerusalem (14:1-2). Zechariah describes the Mount of Olives as the locus of eschatological redemption and/or judgment. On the other hand, Burnett believes that the Mount of Olives in 24:3, like "mountain" elsewhere in Matthew is the "place of the revelation of eschatological secrets . . . instead of the locus of end-time events" (cf. 5:1; 17:1; 28:16).³ It may not be necessary to choose one against the other. Both may be united in this context. Regardless, eschatological concerns are highlighted.

The Consummation of the Age

The disciples ask for the sign of the consummation of the age (τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). But what is "the consummation of the age?" Fuller contends that συντελεία and τέλος ("the end") must be distinguished. The former term "refers to the whole complex of the last days, from the ministry of Jesus until his parousia," whereas τέλος

¹ Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 65.

² Hooker, "Mark 13," p. 84.

³ Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 212.

is to be regarded as the absolute end.¹ This is based upon: 1) the added force of the preposition συν- suggesting that συντελεία involves various parts which unite and bring one up to the end (τέλος); 2) the use of συντελεία in Hebrews 9:26 where the reference is clearly to the cross work as the terminus a quo for the συντελεία; 3) the uses of the same word in Matthew 13:39,40 and 49 where the terminus ad quem is given; and 4) an apparent distinction by the translator of the LXX in his use of the two words in Daniel.² In Gundry's understanding, συντελεία could denote an extended period of time.³ Are these evidences valid?

Συντελεία refers to a divinely appointed eschatological end, especially in the apocalyptic portions of Daniel (LXX, 11:35,40; 12:4,7).⁴ In Judaism, it included the end itself and the related events. The phrase "consummation of the age(s)" is used six times in the NT.⁵ All but Hebrews 9:26 are found in Matthew (13:39,40,49; 24:3; 28:20). In Matthew it is most likely that the phrase "looks to the final judgment and consummation of all

¹George C. Fuller, "The Olivet Discourse: An Apocalypse Time-Table," WTJ 28 (1965):158.

²Ibid., pp. 159-60.

³Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 140.

⁴TDNT, s.v. "τέλος," by Gerhard Delling, 8:66.

⁵Ibid.

things."¹ But there is no impression that the phrase signifies an extended period of time such as the church age, as Fuller posits. This fact can be seen from: 1) the plural ("consummation of the ages") occurs in Hebrews 9:26 and sets it apart from the Matthean use of the phrase which is always singular; 2) the uses in Matthew 13:39,40 and 49 do not merely describe the terminus ad quem, but limit συντελεία to the time of harvest at the end of history;² 3) Matthew 28:20 distinguishes two time periods when Jesus states, "I am with you all the days up to (ἕως) the consummation of the age" (author's translation). In this passage, the συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος cannot have reference to the church age, but must refer to the close of human history--nearly synonymous with τέλος; 4) Jesus does not use συντελεία but τέλος in the Discourse.³ It is highly unlikely that this was designed to be a correction of a misconception on the part of the disciples, as Gundry speculates.⁴ Such a possible correction appears to be too exquisitely subtle. On the other hand, as Gundry also suggests, "the disciples evidently understood the consummation as the single crisis

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 497.

²Rand, "Olivet Discourse," p. 155.

³Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," pp. 7-8 proposes that the cognate τέλος picks up the συντελεία; also Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 230.

⁴Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 144.

at Jesus' advent. . . ."¹; 5) the consummation of the age cannot be the age itself. If the consummation of the age runs from the ministry of Jesus to the Parousia as Fuller hopes to prove, when was/is the age itself?; 6) the age in view may be the Jewish age,² i.e., the disciples may be asking not about the consummation of the church age concerning which they knew nothing, but about Daniel's seventieth week decreed for the Jewish people (Dan 9:26,27);³ and 7) τέλος is equivalent to $\gamma\beta$ which in Daniel 12:4,13 is rendered by συντελεία in the LXX.⁴

The conclusion of these evidences points to a synonymous use of συντελεία and τέλος, both of which arrive contemporaneously at the Parousia. It could be, however, that the συντελεία looks at the end with preceding events in view (though the συντελεία itself does not include these events), somewhat similar to Jewish conceptions;⁵ τέλος looks at the end without consideration of preceding events (even though there may be such events). Perhaps the disciples use συντελεία because they are interested in the end

¹Ibid.

²It may be significant that this phrase under discussion only appears in two works with Jewish characteristics, Matthew and Hebrews.

³Rand, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 153-54.

⁴Cranfield, "Mark 13," p. 289, note 4.

⁵See p. 87 above.

as it is viewed through preceding events (e.g. "When will these things be?" v. 3).

The Parousia

The word παρουσία ("coming," 24:3) occurs nowhere else in the Synoptics, and all four uses in Matthew fall within chapter 24 (vv. 3,27,37,39). It is common knowledge that the word was used of the arrival of a king, emperor or ruler, and in classical literature it took on the meaning of either presence or coming of an individual in order to be present.¹ In the NT, there is little question that it refers to the Second Coming. When used of Jesus in the Pauline epistles, it is a technical term for the Second Coming.² It would be difficult to read παρουσία in the Matthew 24 context in any other way than in reference to Christ's Second Advent.

Perhaps παρουσία relates to the LXX rendering of Daniel 7:13 with the twice-used πάρεμι. This fits the frequent reference in the Gospels to the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.³ There is no hint here of the kind of "coming" of Christ found in

¹NIDNTT, s.v. "παρουσία," by G. Braumann, 2:898; Carson, "Matthew," p. 497; see BAGD, p. 635, for examples of the word meaning both "presence" and "coming" in the NT.

²Tasker, *Matthew*, p. 228; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 75-76.

³Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 78.

24:29-31 by those of the historical approach.

The Beginning of Messianic Woes (24:4-8)

The Unity of 24:4-31

A correct understanding of the Discourse material that now follows is highly dependent upon the unity or disunity of the 24:4-31 pericope. Two approaches rightfully maintain the highest level of unity for the passage: the historical and the eschatological approaches. The historical-eschatological approach tends toward a disunity of the material, e.g. in understanding a marked distinction between the tribulation of verse 21 and that of verse 29. Brown, in an attempt to establish the historical approach, has compiled an impressive list of overlapping or repeated concepts that links together the 4-31 material. The following list is mostly Brown's,¹ with the addition of several phrases:

- (1) an inclusion at vv. 4b-5 and 23-25
- (2) "many" (πολλοί, vv. 10,11[2],12)
- (3) "tribulation" (θλίψις, vv. 9,21,29)
- (4) "elect" (ἐκλεκτοί, vv. 22,24,31)
- (5) "end" (τέλος, vv. 6,13,14; συντελεία, v. 3)
- (6) "all nations" (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, vv. 9,14)
- (7) "do not believe them" (μὴ πιστεύσητε, vv. 23,26)
- (8) "great" (μεγάλη, vv. 21,24)
- (9) "sign(s)" (σημεῖον,-α, vv. 3,24,30)
- (10) "appear" (φαίνω, vv. 27,30)
- (11) "those days" (αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκεῖναι, vv. 19,22[2],29)
- (12) "east . . . west"; "one end of heaven to the other" (vv. 27,31).

With so many common elements, the cohesion of the passage

¹Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 4.

can hardly be denied.

Overview of Interpretations

Most expositors understand verses 4-8 to be fulfilled in the events surrounding A.D. 70. This is true of those of the historical as well as the historical-eschatological approach. Another alternative for the latter approach is to view the 4-8 passage as a description of the history of the world.¹ Those of the eschatological approach divide between seeing these verses as a portrait of the present age and of the future Tribulation period. Rand categorizes E. Schuyler English, J. N. Darby, A. C. Gaebelin, William Kelley and C. I. Scofield in favor of the Tribulation and Lewis Sperry Chafer, H. A. Ironside and John F. Walvoord supporting the present age.²

Rand himself objects to reading the passage in light of the seven-year tribulation until verse 9 because: 1) even those who maintain the tribulation is mentioned in verses 4-8, also state the passage by application is characteristic of the present age. In his opinion, if verses 4-8 can be seen as a secondary interpretation, then there should be no objection to making it the primary interpretation; 2) parallels with Revelation 6 are not determinative

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 501; cf. also Tasker's historical approach which holds this understanding of vv. 4-8; Tasker, Matthew, p. 224.

²Rand, "Olivet Discourse," p. 171.

since the signs mentioned are not signs of the end (24:6); 3) the OT never refers to the Tribulation as the beginning of travail but as the travail itself. Preliminary pains must be distinguished from the pain itself.¹

As will be seen from the following discussion, a strong case can be made in support of the fact that verses 4-8 do indeed unfold the beginning of the future Tribulation. Rand's remarks can be briefly countered, although a full support of the author's understanding will be argued shortly. First, the jump from secondary application to primary interpretation is a wider chasm than Rand implies. One can validly object to making 4-8 "mean" the present age while still allowing application to the present age. Second, the parallel with Revelation 6:3-8 should not be ignored.² Judgments of war, famine, pestilence, and death are mentioned with a fifth seal judgment (6:9) describing martyrdom (cf. Matt 24:9). This parallel may suggest that Matthew 24:4-8 refers to the future Tribulation. Third, preliminary travail certainly does include travail itself. The "beginning of birth pangs" may well describe the inception of Tribulation judgments.

¹Ibid., pp. 174-75.

²Barbieri, "Matthew," p. 76; Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 279; this fact is also admitted by Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 267.

The Time of Verses 4-8

"Not yet the end"

Two phrases give the central clues to the time period involved in 4-8: "but that is not yet the end" (v. 6) and the contrasting phrase, "the beginning of birth pangs" (v. 8). Much of the Olivet Discourse hangs upon the meaning of these phrases.

The word τέλος when used eschatologically, has in mind the "final act of the cosmic drama,"¹ i.e., it is a technical term for the end of the world in eschatological contexts.² An absolute end is in view and, as Gundry observes, it must close the Tribulation, not include it (cf. Matt 24:14).³ A misunderstanding concerning τέλος has led some dispensationalists to suppose that verses 4-8 give some general characteristics of the church age which "would in no way indicate that the end [the Tribulation] had begun."⁴ But these general signs (vv. 4-8) could begin the seven-year Tribulation without marking the final climax.

This conception of τέλος not only sets aside the view that the word encompasses the entire Tribulation. It also nullifies views that reduce the word to mean the A.D.

¹BAGD, p. 811.

²NIDNTT, s.v. "τέλος," by R. Schippers, 2:62.

³Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 140.

⁴Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, p. 436.

70 fall of Jerusalem or a period of time from A.D. 70 to the Parousia.¹ This is confirmed by the context. Verses 4-14 assume a more worldwide setting (e.g. v. 7, nation against nation; v. 9, all nations; etc.). On the other hand, to say that the end is not yet come does imply that the signs will entail a period of time, but does not by necessity imply a lengthy period.² A seven-year period would suffice.

"The beginning of birth pangs"

It is commonly held that the ὥδίν ("birth pangs," v. 8) was a Jewish technical term for the sufferings that would precede the reign of the Messiah.³ The basis for this was the OT (e.g. Isa 26:17; 66:8; Jer 22:23; Hos 13:13; Mic 4:9). Such passages outline the intense suffering and divine judgment that would precede a future day of deliverance for Israel.⁴ This theme recurs in pseudepigraphal literature (Book of Jubilees 23:18; Apocalypse of

¹Cf. Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 231.

²Contra Carson, "Matthew," p. 497; Norval Geldenhuys, "Our Lord's Teaching Concerning the End," EvQ 19 (1947):166.

³Carson, "Matthew," p. 498; BAGD, p. 895; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 102; Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 88, note 11; Avila argues that Jesus began to reign at His resurrection, so the "beginning of sorrows" would be the events from His death up to A.D. 70; Ibid., p. 97. But if the Messianic reign begins at Christ's resurrection, the "beginning of sorrows" coincides with and follows (not precedes) the reign of the Messiah.

⁴TDNT, s.v. "ὥδίν," by Georg Bertram, 9:672.

Baruch 27-30) and

it appears that during the period of theological development after the close of the Old Testament canon, this period became known technically as the "sorrows of the Messiah." . . . This supposition is confirmed by the later Rabbinical literature. . . .¹

Some wish to see in the word a symbol for distress of any sort, rather than some Rabbinical idea.² However, Jesus was essentially teaching what contemporary Jewish thought had correctly deduced from OT Scriptures.³

Paul uses ὥδιν in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 in an eschatological setting. There the "birth pangs" has reference to the wrath of the coming day of the Lord (=the Tribulation) as the context makes clear.⁴ Hodges comments that since ὥδινω is associated in a general sense with θλίψις (John 16:21), it is not surprising if they are associated in a technical way in Matthew 24 (v. 8 with v. 21). In the Matthean passage, the words speak of "the agonies of the world's labor pains as a new age is brought forth. The 'beginning of birth pangs' (v. 8) and the 'great tribulation' (v. 21) do not differ in kind, but in intensity."⁵ Therefore, "the beginning of birth pangs" is used to

¹Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 102; cf. Str-B, I, 950.

²Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 290.

³Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 103.

⁴Hodges, "1 Thessalonians 5:1-11," pp. 70-71.

⁵Ibid., p. 78, note 2.

describe the inception of the seven-year Tribulation.

Premonitory signs

Those who wish to see the 24:4-8 passage fulfilled in A.D. 70 can muster evidence from Josephus, Tacitus and others that wars, earthquakes and famines took place in Judea at this time.¹ Those who wish to see the interadvent age in these verses discuss the upsurge of such catastrophes in recent centuries.² For these expositors, "the history of the last 1900 years clearly supports the view that all these things have in a large measure characterized the entire age even though the same characteristics may be present in intensified form as the age moves on to its conclusion."³

An A.D. 70 fulfillment of the signs of verses 4-8 falters at two particular points. First, this opinion overlooks the worldwide scope of the text (e.g. nations and kingdoms, v. 7; and famine, pestilence⁴ and earthquakes "in various regions"⁵ or "in place after place,"⁶ κατὰ τόπους,

¹ Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 20; Broadus, Matthew, p. 483; Alford, Four Gospels, p. 236.

² Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 852.

³ Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 208-9.

⁴ The critical text does not have καὶ λοιμοί ("and plagues," v. 7). It is found in the Lukan parallel (21:11) and can easily be explained by either of two variations of homoeoteleuton (λιμοὶ [καὶ λοιμοὶ] καὶ or λιμοὶ καὶ [λοιμοὶ καὶ]).

⁵ BAGD, p. 822.

⁶ Ibid., p. 406.

(v. 7). Second, and a point which undermines an interadvent fulfillment is that wars,¹ famines, plagues and earthquakes are a frequent image in the OT for eschatological judgments that are coupled with the age of the Antichrist (Ezek 38:19f.; Hag 2:6f.; Zech 14:4f.).² This perspective is affirmed in the Lukan parallel (21:11) which adds, "and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."

Another general sign mentioned in the text concerns deceivers who will come "in the name of" the Messiah (v. 5). It could be reasoned from Mark 13:6 that these pretenders claim to come in the authority of the Messiah, i.e., under divine authority as forerunners of the kingdom.³ This would lend itself toward political "Messiahs," of which the period preceding the destruction of Jerusalem had many. But Matthew states that the deceivers proclaim, "I am the Christ." This would not merely point to political but to religious deceivers. The phrase, "in my name" must refer to a claim to Messiahship.⁴ Most commentators willingly

¹"Reports" (ἀκοή) [of war] (v. 6) is used in Dan 11:44, LXX.

²McNeile, Matthew, p. 346; cf. also Bereshit Rabbah 42:4, "If you shall see kingdoms rising against each other in turn, then give heed and note the footsteps of the Messiah." Fruchtenbaum takes the title for his work on prophecy, Footsteps of the Messiah, from this Rabbinic passage (p. v).

³Cf. Beasley-Murray's discussion in Mark 13, p. 31.

⁴Cranfield, "Mark 13," p. 288, note 1; Carson, "Matthew," pp. 497-98.

admit that even though Josephus records a wealth of information about the destruction of Jerusalem, we have no record here or elsewhere that false religious Messiahs existed before A.D. 70.¹ Masters writes:

If the instance of false Christs was fulfilled in A.D. 70, it is very difficult to explain why the false Christs, who must have been very incidental in the course of history since they are not even mentioned, should be given the prominence of being mentioned first in each of the three [Synoptic] accounts.²

Other details of the passage draw attention to a fulfillment in the Tribulation. First, deception (πλανᾶω,³ vv. 4,5) is a mark of the end time (1 Tim 4:1) and especially of the Tribulation period (2 Thess 2:8-12; Rev 13:14; 18:23). Second, the use of δεῖ ("must take place," v. 6) recalls similar terminology in Daniel (LXX, 2:28f., 45) and Revelation (1:1; 4:1, etc.). This word most often finds its grounds in the will of God and the necessity of prophetic events which stem from the outworking of God's divine program.⁴ Schippers notes that δεῖ is used in Revelation in association with the great tribulation.⁵

¹Alford, Four Gospels, p. 236; McNeile, Matthew, p. 345; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 19; Broadus, Matthew, p. 483.

²Masters, "Eschatology of Jesus," p. 70.

³Cf. NIDNTT, s.v. "πλανᾶω," by W. Günther, 2:459, states that this word is used almost exclusively in an apocalyptic sense.

⁴Thompson, "Gospel of Matthew," p. 248, note 4; Cranfield, "Mark 13," p. 289.

⁵NIDNTT, s.v. "ἐλπίς," by R. Schippers, 2:808.

Woolery upholds a similar understanding when he writes, "Does not the expression mean that in the preparation for the complete reign of the Messiah, conflict is unavoidable, not simply individual and domestic variance ([Matt] 10:34ff.), but conflict of the races and nations, as afterwards depicted in the visions of John in Patmos?"¹ In Daniel, Revelation and Matthew 24, this divine necessity of prophetic events favors an eschatological view of verses 4-8.²

The Function of Verses 4-8

Signs, false signs or no signs?

Jesus emphatically warns against deceptions, calling upon the disciples to keep their composure since the events He lists would not comprise the final moment of human history. Are then the events He mentions to be discounted as signs of the end? Obviously, some think so, criticizing those who would see in this passage evidence of the end-times.³ But Carson is correct in asserting that one goes

¹Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 483-84.

²Along with the δεῖ might be added μέλλω plus the present infinitive (v. 6) which BAGD, p. 501 describes as "denoting an action that necessarily follows a divine decree. . . ." N.B. the passive, "nation shall be raised up (ἐγερθήσεται, v. 7), against nation."

³Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 18, 160-61. Ladd goes so far as to state that the Olivet Discourse contains no signs by which the end can be calculated; Ladd, Presence of the Future, p. 326.

too far if he rejects the fact that Jesus gave us premonitory signs; it is just that these signs do not constitute the end.¹ On the other hand, they do constitute the beginning of the woes that lead to the end.

Chiasm in verses 4-8

Thompson wishes to see a chiasm in the section:

- A. Warning (4b)
- B. Prediction (5)
- B.¹ Prediction (6a)
- A.¹ Warning (6b)²

This may be valid. In addition, a chiasm arises from verse 5, twice throwing πολλοί ("many") into an emphatic position:

- A. Many will deceive (5a)
- B. Coming in Christ's name (5b)
- B.¹ Claiming, "I am the Christ" (5c)
- A.¹ Deceiving many (5d)

The Tribulation of 24:9-14

The Use of "Then" (τότε, vv. 9,10,14)

The Greek word τότε is significant because of its frequency in the Olivet Discourse. It is used nine times in chapter 24 and eight times in chapter 25. In the First Gospel as a whole, it is used 90 times (cf. 6 times in Mark; 10 times in John; 15 times in Luke). It could refer to sequential time ("then") or to coincident time ("at that

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 497.

²Thompson, "Gospel of Matthew," pp. 245-46.

time").¹ Apart from chapter 24, the Matthean use of *tóte* seems to favor a sequential force (about 76 of the 81 occurrences). A coincident time is more rare (perhaps only 2:17; 3:5; 27:9,16,38).

Carson, however, believes that "in Matthean usage only sometimes does it have temporal force . . . , serving more frequently as a loose connective."² He also suggests that the temporal force is occasionally combined with a logical connection to what precedes.³ Because of the elusive nature of the word, however, no sequential force is seen at verse 9.⁴

But to suggest that *tóte* has an elusive meaning in a Discourse that contains many chronological factors⁵ is not a commanding option. On the contrary, the overriding contrasts between verses 4-8 and 9-14 suggest a sequential force of *tóte*. In verse 6, the disciples are told not to worry. This seems an illogical instruction if the disciples are, at the same time, to face hatred, persecution and

¹BAGD, pp. 823-24.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 90. Carson suggests *tóte* is a loose connective in light of Synoptic parallels which seem to prevent some Matthean narratives from being sequential or chronological; Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 458.

⁴Ibid., p. 498; cf. also Alford, Four Gospels, p. 237.

⁵Cf. pp. 1, 33-34.

martyrdom from all nations (v. 9). In 24:16 the disciples are called upon to flee with the utmost diligence. But in 4-8 there is no mark of persecution or the need for flight. Even the wars mentioned do not effect them; they only "hear" (ἀκούειν, v. 6) of them. Noticing the objective description in 24:6 as excluding the disciples Thompson writes, "It seems as though they will not participate actively in them [i.e., the wars], but rather will experience them as uninvolved spectators."¹ In addition, whereas 4-8 is governed by the phrase, "but that is not yet the end" (v. 6), 9-14 is governed by the statement in verse 14, "and then the end shall come." Two differing time periods are in view. If, as was concluded above, the unit 4-8 describes the beginning period of the seventieth week of Daniel (i.e., the Tribulation period), the unit 9-14 is best understood as encompassing the latter period of that same week.² Therefore, the τότε of verse 9 may mark the transition to the last three-and-one-half years of the Tribulation.

At least three additional thoughts add support:

1) the τότε in verses 10 and 14 seems quite sequential, the latter reference unquestionably so. τότε may not be so elusive after all, at least in the Discourse; 2) the above conclusion that 9-14 reveals the second half of the

¹Thompson, "Gospel of Matthew," p. 246.

²Cf. Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 279.

Tribulation harmonizes with the premillennial scheme of prophecy. Israel will dwell in relative safety during the first half of the Tribulation (Dan 9:27), but in the middle of the seventieth week, great persecution will break out (Rev 12:12-17);¹ and 3) the passage does refer to "tribulation."

The Nature of the Tribulation

Tribulation, persecution and "the many"

It is difficult to argue against the fact that "tribulation" (θλίψις) consistently refers to the same concept in the Discourse (vv. 9,21,29). Given all other factors layed out in favor of the seven-year Tribulation being described in verses 4-14, it is reasonable to assume a technical rather than a general use of θλίψις in verse 9 (cf. Rev 7:14). This joins with the use of θλίψις in eschatological passages in the LXX (Dan 12:1; Hab 3:16; Zeph 1:15).²

The persecution of this period is clearly worldwide. The indefinite plural subjects of "they will deliver you up" and "they will kill you" are clarified in the following phrase, "by all nations."³ The reference to all nations "clearly shows that Jesus is not thinking solely of what

¹Ibid., pp. 279-80.

²TDNT, s.v. "θλίψις," by Heinrich Schlier, 3:146.

³Thompson, "Gospel of Matthew," p. 246, note 6.

happens during the life-time of the apostles."¹

The use of "many" (πολλοί) suggests two groups: the majority (πολλοί) and a minority group.² References to the disciples and the elect are kept distinct from the "many" in the Discourse, marking out the "many" as unbelievers.³ Several considerations make the "many" significant in this unit: 1) the word is repeated four times in two verses (11, 12); 2) it is given emphasis several times by the word order; and 3) the article is used with it in verse 12, strengthening the expression.⁴ The phrase recalls the Danielic account of the "many" who join in making a covenant while others remain firm (Dan 9:27; 11:39; perhaps also 8:25; 12:4).⁵ These unbelieving Jews sign the covenant with the Antichrist, which in turn begins the seventieth week of Daniel.⁶ The disciples, in contrast, are true believers who are hated on account of the name of Christ (διὰ τὸ ὄνομα μου, v. 9).

¹Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 853; contra, Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 113-14.

²NIDNTT, s.v. "πολλοί," by F. Graber, 1:96; cf. the NIV translation at verse 12, "the love of most will grow cold."

³Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 95, note 27.

⁴David Wenham, "A Note on Matthew 24:10-12," TB 31 (1980):157.

⁵Ibid., pp. 157-58.

⁶Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, p. 132.

Stumbling, deception and lawlessness

With this background, many who "will be caused to stumble" (σκανδαλίζω, v. 10) must refer to those who are "caused to disbelieve or reject" Christ.¹ In other words, many are enticed into a false belief away from true faith (an apostatizing) because deception and iniquity reach an all-time high. Avila has shown the centrality of deception and lawlessness in this pericope in his observation of a chiasmus,² reproduced with some adaptation:

- A. Worldwide tribulation (v. 9)
- B. Apostasy (v. 10)
- C. Deception and Lawlessness (vv. 11-12)
- B.¹ Perseverance (v. 13)
- A.¹ Worldwide Preaching (v. 14)

In the chiasm, false prophets and lawlessness (ἀνομία)³ are brought together just as in Matthew 7:21-23. Also, apostasy (v. 10) and perseverance (v. 13) balance against each other.⁴ These factors, as well as the inclusion in verses 9 and 14 referring to a universal outlook, helps confirm this

¹Cf. BAGD, p. 752, definition 1b; see also p. 753 under σκανδαλον; cf. Matt 11:6; 13:57; 18:6-9.

²Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," pp. 75, 78.

³Wenham, "Matthew 24:10-12," p. 160 explains that ἀνομία is closely related to βδέλυγμα (abomination), especially in the LXX of Ezek. Its reference is nearly always to idolatrous practices in the temple in Jerusalem. "This evidence makes it quite possible that 'the multiplication of lawlessness' in Matthew 24:12 is intended to refer to idolatrous 'lawlessness' of the sort supremely exemplified in the Danielic βδέλυγμα ἐρημώσεως." Ibid. Matthew speaks of the lawless as unbelievers; cf. Matt 7:23; 13:41.

⁴Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 103, note 49.

chiastic structure.¹

Parallels with Paul's revelation of the day of the Lord are striking. In 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12, the apostle states that the mystery of lawlessness (ἀνομία) is already at work, i.e., before its time. But when the lawless one (ὁ ἄνομος, the Antichrist) is revealed, iniquity will be unrestrained and every form of wicked deception (v. 10) will take place so as to delude those who refuse to believe the truth. According to Revelation 13:8 and 14:9-11, whoever worships the beast and receives his mark, seals his destiny in damnation and judgment. But those who do not worship the image of the beast will be put to death (13:15) and those who do not receive his mark cannot buy or sell (Rev 13:17). Those who are believers can expect the possibility of martyrdom (Rev 6:9-11; 13:7; Dan 7:21,25). The thought of martyrdom alone, apart from Satanic deception, would cause many people of any age to "stumble" by pulling back from the faith. So it is in the tribulation that most peoples' love (ἡ ἀγάπη τῶν πολλῶν,² v. 12) for even their closest family members (cf. Mark 13:12) will become a cold-hearted detachment, even to the point of betraying

¹Ibid., p. 98.

²The genitive is probably subjective, which is supported by the context; Wenham, "Matthew 24:10-12," p. 157, note 2. (The same author observes a chiasm in verses 10-12, constructed around the repetition of καί; Ibid., p. 156.) In the context, the object of love would not be God (contra McNeile, Matthew, p. 347) but other men.

(παραδίδωμι, "deliver . . . to," vv. 9,10) a friend or relative to the appropriate authorities.¹

Perseverance and salvation

The insights established above may give needed guidance to interpreting the difficult verse, "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved" (v. 13). The exact meaning is not pivotal to the chronology of the passage, so a thorough discussion will be avoided. It may not be necessary to decide whether the phrase "to the end" (εἰς τέλος) means the end of one's life or the final climax of history. The frequent use of τέλος in the context as a reference to the absolute End must be allowed some influence on its meaning here. On the other hand, many believers will not remain alive until this climactic event if they are martyred (v. 9). Both the end of life and the end of the world could be implied.² The deliverance or "salvation" may be construed as physical, i.e., those who endure the hardships of the tribulation will be physically rescued by Christ's coming.³ The only other use of σώζω (v. 22) in the Discourse supports a physical deliverance. Romans 11:26 ("all Israel will be saved") includes physical deliverance

¹The persecution appears to involve religious and political sources; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 26.

²Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 854; Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 146.

³TDNT, s.v. "κολοβόω," by Gerhard Delling, 3:823-24.

as the following quote from Isaiah 59:20,21 implies (vv. 26b-27).¹ Many passages testify to this truth (Jer 30:7; Isa 41:8-14; Hab 3:13; Zech 12:7-9).

Yet the spiritual overtones cannot be extricated from the text. The concepts of persevering in love toward others² and holding steadfast to the truth in the midst of deception rather than apostatizing³ are important elements

¹Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 213. The word σωζω does carry the thought of deliverance from enemies (cf. Luke 1:71). "Salvation" in this sense is common in the OT, especially in the Psalms. Note also, 1) concerning the Second Coming Luke 21:28 speaks of "redemption" in a physical sense; 2) the parallels to Matt 24:13 (10:22; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:19) are all colored by the theme of the Second Coming, and all contain references to physical flight (10:23; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:21); 3) Luke 21:18,19 stress the physical by stating even one's hair will not perish, but he will gain his life (ψυχή); and 4) Dan 12:12 is recalled by the Matt 24:13 passage and suggests physical deliverance.

²The view of Thompson, "Gospel of Matthew," p. 225; and Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," pp. 9-10. Matt 25:31-46 declares that the Gentiles of the Tribulation will be judged by their love or lack of love for Christ's "brethren." Those who did an act of love toward Christ's brethren, are righteous (v. 37) and enter eternal life (v. 46). Those who never did one act of love to Christ's brethren (vv. 42-43) are unbelievers (v. 41) who enter eternal punishment. Theologically, this can only be understood as believers and unbelievers both exhibiting their respective righteous or depraved natures so that their actions betray their relationship to God.

³David L. Turner, "Enduring to the End," Spire 10 (Winter 1982):3; Wenham, "Matthew 24:10-12," pp. 158-60 feels that Dan 12:4 in the LXX forms a background to the 10-12 unit. The LXX of θ reads, "Seal up the book until the time of consummation (συντελεία), until the many (οἱ πολλοί) apostatize (ἀπομανῶσιν) and the earth is filled (πλησθῇ) with unrighteousness" (author's translation). [Cf. Matt 24:12, καὶ διὰ τὸ πληθύνεσθαι τὴν ἀνομίαν, which Alford, Four Gospels, p. 237 translates, "because iniquity is filled up."]. The LXX has interpreted (or misinterpreted)

in the passage. Revelation 14:12 uses the same word for perseverance (ὑπομονή) as found in this passage (v. 13). There, the steadfast loyalty of the saints is that they hold fast to Christ and do not worship the beast or receive his mark (vv. 11,12; cf. 13:8-10; cf. Dan 11:32-35). The Tribulation pressures will be of such a nature to draw out on two clearly and drastically opposing sides those who believe and those who do not. From another angle, it may be said that men will either side with the persecutors or the persecuted. Those who reject the Antichrist and believe in the Christ, will be saved to eternal life.¹

the Hebrew to refer to apostasy of the many in the last days. Ibid., p. 159.

¹One other option can be offered. The Lukan (21:19) parallel to Matt 24:13 is, "By your endurance you will gain your lives." What is a "salvation" in Matt becomes a gaining of the soul in Luke (κτῆσασθε τὰς ψυχὰς). This concept is akin to the Lord's logion about "saving the soul" (Luke 17:33, in an eschatological context; 9:24; Mark 8:35; Matt 10:39; 16:25; John 12:25; cf. also Jas 1:21; 1 Pet 1:9). Simply stated, by this logion Jesus taught that only complete dedication and faithfulness could gain a life of eternal value and glory. Christians who live disobediently, caught up in this world, will find their life valueless and lost with respect to eternal rewards; Zane C. Hodges, The Hungry Inherit (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), pp. 73-80. Christians who live unfaithfully during the Tribulation must face further consequences. Those believers who give in to the pressures of worldwide lawlessness (Matt 24:12) will not escape the catastrophic judgments of the Great Tribulation. These divine judgments threaten the extinction of all mankind (24:22) and unfaithful believers will lose their lives along with many unbelievers (e.g. Rev 6:8; 8:11; 9:15). Not all faithful believers will be preserved alive for the millennium. To be sure, many will face martyrdom (Matt 24:9). But by the time Christ comes and the Tribulation has ended, and the living Gentiles are gathered for judgment, it is evident that at this assembly there are no unfaithful

The gospel of the kingdom

Apart from dispensational circles, it is widely held that the "gospel of the kingdom" mentioned in 24:14 is none other than the same gospel message of salvation that Paul preached. That the Scriptures everywhere declare the singleness of the gospel is often the final argument for this view. Dispensationalists, some argue, define the "gospel of the kingdom" in such a way as to present two gospels, not one, since they make the phrase mean the good news of the coming millennial kingdom.¹ A point in favor of viewing the gospel of the kingdom as identical to the general use of "gospel" elsewhere in the Scriptures is the fact that the parallel in Mark 13:10 has only the word "gospel."

Obviously, one's concept of the kingdom will influence his interpretation of this phrase. The author's

believers (25:31-46). Therefore, those who were "saved" from the Tribulation catastrophes were those who faithfully endured to the end (24:13). In this understanding, then, endurance (faithfulness) brings physical deliverance and spiritual preservation for eternal rewards. Idem, Grace in Eclipse. A Study on Eternal Rewards (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1985), pp. 102-4. In other words, faithful believers, if they are martyred, are richly rewarded; and if they remain faithful to Christ's coming, receive the privilege of entering the millennium. Unfaithful believers meet a premature death and receive a closed door to the millennial experience (cf. Matt 25:10-12). Cf. F. E. Marsh, "Who Are Represented by the Wise and the Foolish Virgins?: Matt. XXV," in Aids to Prophetic Study No. 39 (London: Thynne and Co., Ltd., 1930), pp. 32, 42. Despite these conclusions, what does seem clear from Rev is that no true believer will be deceived so as to worship the beast or receive his mark.

¹ Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 129.

premillennial presuppositions lead him to the following conclusions. First, the "gospel of the kingdom" could refer to a message that emphasizes the subject of the kingdom and at the same time proclaims the centrality of the work of Christ on the cross.¹ That is, whenever the "gospel of the kingdom" is preached, the salvation message is included implicitly or explicitly. Therefore, Matthew and Mark easily harmonize with the dispensational scheme. Second, the phrase is used only in Matthew (4:23; 9:35; 24:14). In the first two references, the content of the gospel of the kingdom is identified with the statement, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (cf. 4:17 with 23; and 9:35 with 10:1 and 7). This was also the message proclaimed by John the Baptist (3:2). There exists, then, an important parallel between the gospel of the kingdom preached at Christ's first advent and the same gospel of the kingdom, according to the Discourse, preached at Christ's second advent.² Third, even nondispensationalists define the gospel of the kingdom in 24:14 as the good news that the Messianic kingdom and reign is near,³ as elsewhere in Matthew. If, as has already been suggested, "the end" (τὸ τέλος) is coterminous with the

¹Cf. Pentecost, Things to Come, pp. 212, 296.

²Rand, "Olivet Discourse," p. 232; W. M. Forbes, "The Gospel of the Kingdom," Spire 10 (Winter 1982):4-5.

³Broadus, Matthew, p. 485; McNeile, Matthew, p. 347.

Second Coming, then the message of the nearness of the Messianic kingdom and reign will reach the whole inhabited earth right before the Parousia, i.e., it will at least be proclaimed during the Tribulation period. This is all of one piece with the premillennial scheme. If the kingdom and reign of Christ have begun at the resurrection, i.e., Christ is now reigning in the kingdom of men's hearts or in a heavenly kingdom, then the gospel of the kingdom cannot be a message about the nearness of the kingdom as it is for Matthew in all his other references. Instead, the gospel of the kingdom would have to concern the arrival of the kingdom. But Matthew gives no indication that he has altered his definition of the gospel of the kingdom.

Fourth, the demonstrative, "this (τοῦτο) gospel of the kingdom," carries us back to the preceding verse. The gospel of the kingdom includes as a basic tenet the message that perseverance to the end brings salvation (v. 13). Drawing from the previously discussed conclusions on that verse, it may be said that the gospel of the kingdom will comprise the message that those who steadfastly believe in Christ and reject apostatizing to the Antichrist, will gain eternal life;¹ or that those who endure the persecutions and remain alive until Christ comes, through flight (24:16) or some other means, will be delivered from their enemies

¹Forbes, "Gospel of the Kingdom," p. 5.

and enter the millennial kingdom.¹

Excursus: The Church Versus Israel

Most premillennial interpretations maintain that the prophecies of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse are not fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The disciples, then, must be addressed as representative of others who live after them. Pre- and posttribulationists split on the issue as to which group is being represented: the believing (or unbelieving) Jews or the church of the Tribulation? "Here then is the central question, namely, whether the Apostles to whom Christ gave this discourse represent their nation Israel (in which case the church's presence should not be read into the discourse) or whether they represent the coming church (in which case events described involve the church)."² But even this question may not pinpoint the issue precisely. Sproule's reasoning is better:

To assert that the apostles were representative of the church at the time of the Olivet Discourse and that Jesus was addressing them as such is to say much more than the data allows. The real question is not one of representation but rather a question of the content of the discourse and the context in which it was spoken.³

¹See p. 110, note 1.

²Bruce A. Ware, "Is the Church in View in Matthew 24-25?," BSac 138 (1981):159.

³Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," p. 46.

In recent years, Robert Gundry has led the field in the defense of posttribulationism. He implies that the Olivet Discourse is the central portion of revelation upon which his posttribulation doctrine is built; subsequent NT revelation only confirms his position. He argues that pretribulationists must look to other passages to demonstrate a pretribulation rapture (and therefore, the absence of the church in the Discourse).¹ One false presupposition behind this reasoning is that the Olivet Discourse ought to be permitted to be interpreted in isolation. This stands against the analogy of faith and the interpretive principle of 2 Peter 1:20.² In fact, as Ware implies no one tribulationist position relies on Matthew 24-25 alone for its proof.³ If the Scriptures declare elsewhere that church saints will be taken out of the world before the Tribulation, then the issue is solved for Matthew 24. It is this author's conviction that this truth must be established elsewhere in the NT (e.g. Rev 3:10; 1 Thess 5:9,10) and then brought to bear on the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse. What interpreter has not relied upon Paul's

¹Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 129.

²See "Hermeneutical Presuppositions," Chapter I, pp. 15-20. It is interesting that Gundry does look to other Scriptures for proof that the church is in the Discourse since he feels it necessary to "determine from other Scriptures whether the apostles usually represent Israel or the church"; Ibid., p. 133.

³Ware, "The Church in Matthew 24-25?," pp. 158-59.

delineation of justification by faith to help exegete difficult soteriological passages in the OT, Gospels, or Epistles? Nevertheless, the issue as it relates to Matthew must be addressed.

Ware has adequately countered the basic reasons stated by Gundry for the inclusion of the church in the Tribulation as described in the Olivet Discourse. A very brief overview of these reasons and Ware's rebuttals is worthwhile.¹ Ware rightly gives credit to Gundry for demonstrating that the presence of the Discourse in the Synoptics and the Jewish character of the Discourse cannot prove or disprove the church is in the Tribulation.² But the same is true for Gundry's argument that "the only two references to the Church in any of the gospels both occur in Matthew. . . ."³ In Gundry's opinion, the final rejection of the Israel in the previous context argues that Jesus is now turning to the church.⁴ Ware counters by showing that even in the previous context, God's rejection of Israel is not final and Matthew 24 could address God's future dealings with Israel as mentioned in Matthew 23:39.⁵

¹Unless specified, all of the following discussion will relate to one or more pages in: Ware, "The Church in Matthew," pp. 158-72; or Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, pp. 130-34. For the sake of brevity, only the author and page will be given.

²Ware, pp. 162-63.

³Gundry, p. 131.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ware, pp. 163-64.

What of the Jewish elements in the Discourse?

Gundry believes they are a description of Jewish church saints.¹ Ware refutes this by observing that there is no exclusively churchly elements in the Discourse.² All things being equal, it seems that Ware admits to a draw on this point: "Undoubtedly Jesus could have been addressing Christians [church saints] in His warning, but He could equally have been addressing Jewish nonchurch tribulation saints . . . [original emphasis]."³

For Gundry, since the precursory fulfillment of the Discourse (A.D. 70) took place within the church age, the final fulfillment must also.⁴ Ware notes that the time of the precursory fulfillment is irrelevant to the final event itself.⁵ A pretribulationist might argue (just as weakly) that since the precursory fulfillment of the Abomination of Desolation of Daniel (i.e., through Antiochus Euphianes) took place during a time in which the church was nonexistent on earth, the final fulfillment must also.

Finally, Gundry attempts to establish that the apostles are more often representative of the church than Israel.⁶ The rejoinder to this argument is simple: to show what the Apostles became is not the same as proving

¹Gundry, p. 132.

²Ware, pp. 164-65.

³Ibid., p. 165.

⁴Gundry, p. 133.

⁵Ware, pp. 169-70.

⁶Gundry, pp. 133-34.

who they represent in Matthew 24 before the church came into existence.¹ In addition, since the disciples can represent either, the issue must be settled by the Discourse content.²

Moo has listed his objections in a slightly different way than Gundry. His arguments are countered by Feinberg, representing the pretribulational position.³ For Moo, the description in Matthew 24-25 is identical to Paul's descriptions elsewhere (1 Thess 4 and 2 Thess 2) where the church is addressed. "For surely, if Paul addresses the church in the Thessalonian epistles, it is obvious that Jesus, who says virtually the same thing, is also addressing the church."⁴ Feinberg does not seem to speak to this objection, but the answer is not difficult. While Jesus speaks of those Jewish saints who will be in the Tribulation in 24:4-28, Paul tells the church they will not (1 Thess 5:9,10). They address the same subject (i.e., the

¹Ware, p. 170; Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," p. 46. Sproule also adds the critique, "One wonders why the apostles can be so readily regarded as representative of the church for the purposes of interpreting the Olivet Discourse and the Apostle John, years later when he is the only apostle living, is readily rejected as a representative of the church in Revelation 4:1"; Ibid., p. 44.

²Walvoord, Blessed Hope, p. 86.

³Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, pp. 193-95; and Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, pp. 229-30. For the sake of brevity, only the author and pages will be cited here.

⁴Moo, p. 194.

Tribulation), but from dramatically different vantage points. Second, Moo argues that the word "elect" is consistently used in the NT for members of the church.¹ But Feinberg notes that the original hearers would have understood the "elect" in light of the OT, not the NT epistles. We too should see it this way. Because of progressive revelation, some Gospel passages like the Olivet Discourse may have a closer affinity to the OT than to the epistles.² Finally, Moo claims that the nature of the exhortations in the Discourse (24:36-25:13) are used of the church elsewhere.³ The response by Feinberg suggests that such exhortations are general enough to have validity for either the church at the rapture or tribulation saints at the Second Coming.⁴

One concluding remark is in order. If the Olivet Discourse is addressed to the church, then all its members are brazenly disobedient if they are not fulfilling the command to "pray that your flight might not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath" (24:20) in the same way that Jesus taught to "pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers" (Matt 9:38, KJV).

¹Ibid.

²Feinberg, p. 230.

³Moo, p. 195.

⁴Feinberg, p. 230.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the disciples, in asking their question of Jesus (24:3), thought of the fall of Jerusalem, the coming of Christ and the close of the age as a single complex event which they correctly united. The fall of Jerusalem which was both in their question and in the answer of Jesus was not the historical event of A.D. 70 but a yet future fall of Jerusalem that according to the OT preceded the coming of the Messianic age. This thought is assisted by the eschatological significance of the Mount of Olives. If, when the disciples asked about the "consummation of the age," they thought of the interadvent age, an eschatological view of their question may be problematic. But a study of this phrase reveals that it is used in the Discourse virtually synonymous with the final end of all things (τέλος).

In the 24:4-8 unit, significant evidence was discovered to confirm that the seven-year tribulation of the end-times is depicted. The phrase "but that is not yet the end" (v. 6) together with the phrase "the beginning of birth pangs" (v. 8) outline the chronological limits of the unit. The latter phrase marks the inception of the Tribulation, as is confirmed by Paul's identical use of "birth pangs" in 1 Thessalonians 5:3. The premonitory signs of wars, earthquakes, plagues and famines as well as other factors suggest divine judgment typical of the day of the Lord.

The next unit (9-14) is introduced by the connective *τότε*. While it does not always have sequential force, the contrasts of this unit with the preceding unit (4-8) make it improbable that the same span of time is in view. The sequential force of *τότε* in verse 9 means verses 9-14 portray the second three-and-one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week. The nature of the tribulation and persecution in the passage reveals identical conceptions to the eschatological tribulation and persecution set forth in other prophetic passages. In fact, an aggregate of eschatologically flavored concepts emerges: "the many," tribulation, lawlessness, perseverance, deception, etc. Even the gospel of the kingdom is best understood as a proclamation that the Messianic, millennial reign is at hand--a proclamation which can well be made in the future Tribulation.

Finally, this chapter reviewed the objections and rebuttals to viewing the disciples as representative of Jewish nonchurch saints of the Tribulation. While all such objections can be answered both reasonably and logically, the final decision concerning the issue rests upon the teaching of a pretribulational rapture in other passages. Since in the opinion of the writer the pretribulational rapture truth is clearly taught elsewhere, this scriptural presupposition can be validly used for understanding the Olivet Discourse. Scripture must be used to interpret Scripture.

CHAPTER V

THE GREAT TRIBULATION OF 24:15-28

If, as has been argued, Matthew 24:4-14 describes the entire Tribulation period, what is the role of verses 15-28? The aim of this chapter is to determine the eschatological nature and role of 15-28 and the improbable understanding that the predictions involved are now fulfilled. Evidence will also be presented to show that church saints are not necessarily addressed.

The Relationship of Verses 15-28 to the Preceding

There is little objection to the view that the particle οὐν in 24:15 connects the verse to the preceding material. The question is how are they related? To say that there is no break in the material with the preceding section¹ may be too vague. Likewise, to play down the inferential force of the particle² also seems to make insignificant the relationship of the verse to previous matters. Since οὐν is not generally a temporal indicator, the

¹Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 163.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 500.

chronology of 24:15 does not have to be subsequent to verses 9-14. In fact, several expositors view 24:15 as explaining a further detail of the period described in verses 4-8 or 9-14.¹ Can more precision be unfolded?

If at verse 14, the absolute end (τὸ τέλος) is reached, and 9-14 describe the second half of the Tribulation of the end-time, it is natural for the unit 24:15-28 to describe the same period of time.² Eternity or the millennium which follow the end are certainly not in view. This pattern of returning to previously discussed material is explained by recapitulation (law of recurrence), a common Hebrew stylistic device found in the OT³ and in the Book of Revelation.⁴ Lange, who conceives of the chronology of Matthew spanning the interadvent age, nevertheless maintains the truth of Matthew's recapitulating style. He states: "In harmony with apocalyptic style, He [Jesus] exhibited the judgments of His coming in a series of cycles,

¹Carson sees v. 15 as one part of the interadvent age, *Ibid.*; Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 91, sees v. 15 as one war in the "wars and rumors of wars" (vv. 6-8) of the period from Christ's death to the destruction of Jerusalem; cf. also Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 186.

²Cf. McNeile, *Matthew*, p. 347 and France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, p. 231 who connect τὸ τέλος with 24:15.

³Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, pp. 5-6; Gundry, *Church and the Tribulation*, p. 75. Examples include Gen 1 and 2, and Ezek 38 and 39.

⁴*Ibid.*; Ronald R. Gibson, "The Meaning and Chronology of the Trumpets of Revelation" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1980), pp. 260-75.

each of which depicts the whole futurity, but in such a manner that with every new cycle the scene seems to approximate to, and more closely resemble, the final catastrophe."¹ Being so highly Jewish in orientation, Matthew could naturally utilize Hebrew style to record Jesus' Discourse. As a result, Matthew 24:15-28 returns to the middle point of the seven-year Tribulation to rehearse pertinent factors passed over or only briefly mentioned in the summary of that period (4-14). When the two units are read together, several distinct impressions emerge. The answer to the disciples' question (v. 3) is outlined broadly in 9-14 and now specifically in verse 15ff. The "abomination of desolation" is the sign that marks the nearness of the τέλος and instigates the persecution and apostasy of verses 9-10. The need to flee (24:16) implies a situation that arises from persecution, hatred, and potential martyrdom. Just such a situation was detailed in the previous material (vv. 9-10). This flight may also be what it means to endure so as to be saved (v. 13).² The exegesis of the section will bear out this understanding.

¹John Peter Lange, The Gospel According to Matthew, in vol. 1 of Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, trans. and ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1867), p. 418.

²Broadus, Matthew, p. 485.

The Abomination of Desolation (v. 15)¹

Verse 15 is definitely a crux interpretum. Ford affirms that the exegesis of the whole chapter revolves around the exegesis of this verse.² Likewise, Fuller believes that the interpretation of the "abomination of desolation" may be the key issue in determining the structure of the Olivet Discourse.³ Such high evaluations of the importance of verse 15 to the rest of the Discourse may be overstated. The whole of the Discourse will inform verse 15 just as much as, if not more than, the exegesis of the "abomination of desolation" will influence the whole of the Discourse. Regardless, the verse is crucial to an understanding of Jesus' prophecy.

It is not at all surprising that the views of the "abomination of desolation" fall into two broad categories: an historical A.D. 70 fulfillment and an eschatological fulfillment. What is surprising is the lack of unity about the precise point of fulfillment among those who defend the historical position. McNeile gives a brief survey of a few of the opinions held by those who see the abomination prophecy fulfilled in A.D. 70.

¹For the history of interpretation with regard to the "abomination of desolation," see Beasley-Murray, Mark 13, pp. 59-72.

²Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 147.

³Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 172.

Some expositors think of the desecration of the temple by Zealots just before Titus besieged the city (Jos. BJ IV. iii. 6-8, vi. 3); others of some action by the Romans similar to that of Antiochus; e.g. Pilate's introduction into the city of the standards bearing the image of Caesar (BJ II. ix. 2), Caligula's attempt to set up his own statue in the temple (Ant. XVIII. viii. 8), the erection of Vespasian's equestrian statue in the Holy of Holies (Jer.), or of the statue of Titus on the site of the ruined temple (Chrys.).¹

The difficulty in pinpointing the exact fulfillment in A.D. 70 is evidenced by this wide range of possibilities. This alone comprises an argument against an historic fulfillment. Fuller, while holding this viewpoint, admits,

If conclusive proof for this opinion [A.D. 70 fulfillment] were available, there would not be the wide latitude of interpretations that are current. In place of such proof only indications can be offered as defense for this position.²

Definitions

The Greek phrase τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως is most popularly known as the "abomination of desolation" (KJV, NASB, NEB). However, it has been variously translated, "the detested thing causing desolation,"³ "the horror which consists in desolation,"⁴ or "the abomination characterized by desolation."⁵ Carson is perhaps right that the phrase

¹McNeile, Matthew, p. 348.

²Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 172.

³McNeile, Matthew, p. 348; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 34; BAGD, p. 138.

⁴Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 292.

⁵Broadus, Matthew, p. 485; Carson, "Matthew," p. 500.

itself is unclear as to whether the abomination causes the desolation or is simply a token of it.¹ His motivation for this reasoning seems to be his desire to find an A.D. 70 fulfillment. At that time, the "abomination" (the presence of the Roman standards in the temple area) was the result of a desolating siege rather than the cause of it.² But the context declares that the "abomination" comes first, and great tribulation follows, not precedes, this event (v. 21). Therefore, the idea of the abomination causing the desolation or leading to it seems implicit in the text. The NIV translation is preferable, "the abomination which causes desolation."

τὸ βδέλυγμα

The word βδέλυγμα denotes something abhorrent and detestable. In the OT it has reference especially to pagan objects or idols particularly repulsive to God. Idols or idolatry are frequently noticed by scholars in the LXX use of the term.³ Several references in the NT (Rev 17:4,5; 21:8,27) connect with this OT (and the Rabbinic) usage where "abomination" connotes the need to separate from that which is unclean, pagan and heathen.⁴ Elsewhere in the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³BAGD, p. 138; NIDNTT, s.v. "τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως," by G. R. Beasley-Murray, 1:74; TDNT, s.v. "βδέλυγμα," by Werner Foerster, 1:599.

⁴Ibid.

Gospels, it is found in Luke 16:15 where it interestingly applies to anything exalted among men.¹ What must be observed is that idols themselves are not the exclusive background to βδέλυγμα. The term may be a "typical Jewish term of contempt for a heathen deity" itself.² Ford goes so far as to say that βδέλυγμα translates an OT term that relates to "impure things associated with idolatry rather than to idols themselves."³ Part of the evidence for this is the fact that βδέλυγμα is virtually equivalent to ἀνομία ("lawlessness") in the LXX.⁴ But there seems to be no need to make such a subtle distinction. Alford, in hopes of supporting a fulfillment by the first century Zealots, claims that βδέλυγμα is "always used of something caused by the Jews themselves."⁵ This is simply not true (cf. 1 Kgs 11:5; 2 Kgs 23:13).⁶ If the situation of Antiochus IV and the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians 2 are related to the "abomination of desolation" as will be seen, a strictly Jewish "abomination" is all the more questionable. In conclusion, it appears that in the word βδέλυγμα at least

¹Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 157-58.

²Beasley-Murray, "βδέλυγμα," 1:74.

³Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 158.

⁴Ibid.; cf. also Foerster, "βδέλυγμα," p. 598.

⁵Alford, Four Gospels, p. 239.

⁶Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 160.

three concepts merge: idols, idolatry and lawlessness.

ἐρήμωσις

BAGD defines the term ἐρήμωσις as "devastation, destruction, depopulation."¹ The question that surrounds this word has to do with the nature of the destruction or devastation associated with the sacrilege of 24:15. Is this a religious/spiritual desolation² or a physical desolation?³ Walvoord apparently does not feel the term (or the two terms together) imply either a destruction of the city or the temple since the reference is to a future abomination related to the Second Coming. At that time neither the temple or the city of Jerusalem is destroyed.⁴ But others who connect 24:15 with the apparent parallel in Luke 21:20 where Jerusalem's destruction (ἡ ἐρήμωσις αὐτῆς) is predicted, inevitably find a siege of Jerusalem in the words "abomination of desolation."⁵ Apart from the Lukan parallel, appeal may be made to Daniel. References in Daniel to

¹BAGD, p. 309.

²TDNT, s.v. "ἐρήμωσις," by Gerhard Kittel, 2:660; Broadus, Matthew, p. 486; France, Jesus and the Old Testament, pp. 231-32; Beasley-Murray, "βδέλυγμα," p. 74; but cf. a change of mind in Idem, "Second Thoughts on the Composition of Mark 13," NTS 29 (1983):416.

³Ridderbos, Coming of the Kingdom, p. 491; Carson, "Matthew," pp. 500-1; Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 168.

⁴Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 317.

⁵Fuller, "Apocalyptic Time-Table," pp. 160-61, note 3; Carson, "Matthew," pp. 500-1.

which the "abomination" described by Jesus alludes (viz. Dan 9:26-27), always associate the concept with an attack on Jerusalem and the temple.¹ Perhaps both religious and physical desecration are in mind.² Regardless, a form of destruction is described, and it would be incorrect to overlook the distinct contribution ἐρήμωσις brings to the phrase "abomination of desolation" by translating tautologically, "the appalling horror."³

ἐν τόπῳ ἁγίῳ⁴

The abomination of desolation takes place "in the holy place." This could mean the church,⁵ the city of Jerusalem,⁶ the land of Palestine,⁷ or the temple of Jerusalem.⁸ The church can hardly be the meaning since it is

¹Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 67; cf. Beasley-Murray, "Second Thoughts," p. 416.

²Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 250, note 60.

³Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 168; contra Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 304; Tasker, Matthew, p. 229; Moffatt's New Testament.

⁴It is surprising that some scholars, in order to gain impetus for an A.D. 70 fulfillment, would use the expedient of suggesting that the Old Syriac version which deletes this phrase, has a better reading than all the Greek manuscripts; cf. Tasker, Matthew, p. 229; Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future, pp. 255-56.

⁵Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 320.

⁶Summers, "Matthew 24," p. 506.

⁷Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 858.

⁸McNeile, Matthew, p. 348.

not a holy place. Of the remaining choices, the most natural meaning is with reference to the Jerusalem temple. The evidence for this is as follows. First, Jesus made reference to the Book of Daniel. In Daniel, the abomination is always linked with the temple.¹ In the crucial verse, Daniel 9:27, where the Hebrew mentions "wing of abominations," the LXX interpreted the word "wing" by the word "temple." First Maccabees 1:54 also understood Daniel's abomination this way. This apocryphal book viewed the heathen altar erected by Antiochus IV in the Jerusalem temple as the fulfillment of this prophecy. Second, in the NT, the words "holy place" are elsewhere used of the temple (e.g. Acts 6:13; 21:28). Third, Mark's corresponding phrase "where it should not be" (ὅπου οὐ δεῖ, 13:14), could only refer to the temple as far as Christ's Jewish hearers were concerned.² Fourth, the lack of the article in the Matthean phrase cannot be used against the temple view since anarthrous nouns can still be definite, even in prepositional phrases, i.e., "in the holy place." Robertson observes, "The use of a preposition with definite anarthrous nouns is old, as ἐν οἴκῳ."³

¹Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 129.

²Ibid., p. 67.

³A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 756.

It is surprising how this clear evidence is so quickly set aside. One author, for example, concludes that the phrase cannot refer to the temple "for when the Roman standards stood in the temple it was too late for fleeing to the mountains."¹ This, of course, is the conclusion forced upon us if we adopt the Roman standards as the fulfillment of the abomination prophecy. But it is more advisable to find an eschatological fulfillment in keeping with the context and allow the "holy place" to retain its natural meaning.

Evaluation of the Views

It is now possible to look more closely at the precise meaning of τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως. The abomination cannot point to the attempt of Caligula in A.D. 40 to set up a statue of himself in the temple.² The usual motivation for this opinion is to demonstrate that the prophecy was made ex eventu.³ But it may also be rejected simply because it was never fulfilled.⁴ Understanding the abomination to be a statue set up by Pilate or Hadrian is historically questionable. Besides, such events did not

¹Broadus, Matthew, p. 486.

²This is the view of John J. Gunther, "Fate of the Jerusalem Church; the Flight to Pella," TZ 29 (1973):84.

³Beasley-Murray, Mark 13, p. 66.

⁴Carson, "Matthew," p. 500.

precipitate any Judean flight.¹

A third view maintains that the Zealots profaned the temple in the mid-sixties when the high priesthood was assumed by a corrupt man by the name of Phannias or when certain Idumeans were admitted into the temple, resulting in internal conflicts and 8500 deaths.² Lenski states that the Zealot fulfillment is superior because the neuter, τὸ ῥηθέν ("that which was spoken") cannot refer to a person (e.g. an antichrist).³ This, of course, completely sidesteps the masculine participle in Mark 13:14 and Matthew 24:15.⁴ Alford, who holds to a Zealot fulfillment of the abomination, admits that the Zealot desecration of the

¹Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 159.

²Cf. Josephus, War IV. iii. 6-10; v. 1-2; vi. 3.

³Richard C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1953), p. 938.

⁴The critical text has ἑσθηκότα in Mark 13:14. It could be either a masculine singular or a neuter plural accusative. In Matt 24:15 the neuter ἑστὸς appears. In the majority text, however, the decisively masculine singular ἑστὼς appears in both Matt and Mark. The fact that a masculine participle follows the neuter noun "abomination" (βδέλυγμα) causes a grammatical anomaly. But like Rabbinical interpreters, Matthew may be using a grammatical anomaly as a key to interpretation. Even the Hebrew phrase "abomination of desolation" in Daniel deviates from normal grammatical principles (except Dan 12:11). For example, Daniel 11:31 has the substantive with an article but the participle without it (□אֵלֶּשֶׁת־אֱלֹהִים). Daniel 9:27 has a plural noun with a singular participle (□אֵלֶּשֶׁת־אֱלֹהִים). Daniel may be the exemplar for Matthew. Cf. Ford, Abomination of Desolation, pp. 149, 169.

temple in A.D. 67 took place a year after the first investment of the city by the Romans, if Josephus' dating is reliable.¹ This reverses the Matthean order which has conflict following the abomination. Finally, this view disregards the Danielic background for the abomination and the obvious link with the act of Antiochus Epiphanes. The latter should be allowed to form an analogy.²

Roman invasion

By far the most popular understanding applies the abomination to the Roman invasion of A.D. 66-70. Even within this view variance exists in pinpointing the precise fulfillment. Various vile acts practiced by the Romans at the temple site have been suggested as the meaning of the abomination.³ Midrash Rabbah on Leviticus 23:3 claims Titus committed immorality with two harlots in the temple. The historical reliability of these accusations are suspect.⁴

A more acceptable approach holds that the presence

¹Alford, Four Gospels, p. 239.

²Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 160.

³Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to the Gospel of Matthew, trans. Peter Christie, rev. Frederick Combie and William Steward (reprint ed., Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1980), p. 414.

⁴Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 182 states the Jewish Encyclopedia discounts most of this record in its discussion of Titus.

of the Roman standards in the city or temple area constituted the abomination. Broadus summarizes the view: "The Roman military standard, with its eagle of silver and bronze, and under that an imperial bust which the soldiers were accustomed to worship, standing anywhere in the holy city . . . would be abominable in the eyes of all devout Jews, would in itself desolate the holy place according to their feeling. . . ."¹ Several important weaknesses are inherent in a Roman standard fulfillment. First, some feel as Broadus that the "holy place" is the city of Jerusalem or the land of Israel. So, the presence of Roman standards "anywhere in the city" constitutes the abomination. But not only does this approach accept an unnatural meaning for "holy place," the fact is that the Roman standards were brought into Jerusalem by Pilate several years before Jesus spoke these words.² Therefore, the presence of Roman standards in the city or the land in general could hardly be the signal for those in Judea to flee.³ Second, if the presence of the Roman standards at the temple site fulfills the prophecy, other difficulties arise. In Matthew, tribulation follows the abomination. But in

¹Broadus, Matthew, p. 486; cf. Tasker, Matthew, pp. 229-30; et al.

²Josephus, Antiquities XVIII. iii. 1; War II. ix. 2-3.

³Alford, Four Gospels, p. 239; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 172.

the siege of Titus in A.D. 70, the tribulation preceded the abomination.¹ The investment by Titus lasted six months before the soldiers reached the temple. This six-month conflict was accompanied by the "tribulation" of severe bloodshed and famine. Even the siege of Titus was preceded by two other sieges, first under Cestius Gallus (A.D. 66) and then under Vespasian (A.D. 68). Consequently, the historical "tribulation" took place years before the Romans were able to reach the temple. To be added to this is the fact that Matthew describes the flight as following the sight of the abomination, while in the Jewish War the flight took place before the abomination at the temple.² Thus, an historical fulfillment does not meet the details of the passage.

Parallel with Luke 21:20

Despite these difficulties, this understanding that somehow the Roman armies constitute the abomination is supposedly supported by an appeal to the parallel passage in Luke 21:20. There Luke describes the desecration of the city of Jerusalem. Luke is generally seen as the key to interpreting this difficult Matthean verse concerning the

¹Gary G. Cohen, "Is the Abomination of Desolation Past?" Moody Monthly, April, 1975:33.

²Ibid.

abomination of desolation.¹ It is claimed that the two passages deal with the same event. While Matthew describes the event in spiritual terms for his Jewish audience, Luke emphasizes the physical destruction for a Gentile audience.² Two problems surface with this reasoning: 1) a reference to "abomination" is not found in Luke, and 2) Mark, who also speaks of the "abomination of desolation" spoken by Daniel the prophet (13:14),³ may have written to a Gentile audience as well.

Dispensationalists have generally responded by pointing out the following differences between the Matthew and Luke passage: 1) Luke speaks of armies while Matthew does not; 2) Luke's action is outside the city while Matthew's is inside the holy place; 3) Luke mentions that destruction is only near; but Matthew says, "when you see the abomination of desolation."⁴ Luke therefore, refers to A.D. 70 while Matthew speaks of a future event.⁵

But the parallel is also impressive and cannot be

¹Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 172; Carson, "Matthew," p. 500; Ford, Abomination of Desolation, pp. 143-44; et al.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 500.

³The majority text of Mark 13:14 includes τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ Δανιὴλ τοῦ προφήτου.

⁴Rand, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 209-10.

⁵Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 276. But even a non-dispensationalist like Broadus suggests this; Broadus, Matthew, p. 486.

quickly dismissed.¹ It may also be questionable to relegate Luke's record of the Olivet Discourse to a primarily historical emphasis. Luke has a considerable amount of eschatological thought and terminology. Even Luke 21:20 is shortly followed by the eschatological perspective of verse 22: "because these are days of vengeance in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled." Masters has a valuable conclusion in this regard:

The sign that Luke gives of Jerusalem being surrounded by soldiers, is not equivalent to the abomination, though it occurs at approximately the same time. . . . In Matthew and Mark, the abomination is standing, stationary. With respect to the armies Luke uses verbs that accentuate their movement, "encircling" the city and "treading" it under foot. To identify the abomination as the armies is to ignore the context of the abomination in Daniel. There the forces which destroy the city are mentioned in addition to the abomination.²

The Lukan passage, then, more likely refers to an eschatological siege of Jerusalem at approximately the same time (middle of the Tribulation period) as the abomination of Matthew.

Danielic background

References to the abomination of desolation in Daniel give strong confirmation to an eschatological fulfillment of 24:15. Since Jesus refers specifically to the prophecy of Daniel in Matthew and in the majority text of

¹Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 192.

²Masters, "Eschatology of Jesus," p. 49.

Mark, Daniel's contribution to the abomination doctrine must not be slighted. Furthermore, an exhortation is given immediately at this juncture for the reader to comprehend. The reader of the Gospel or of Daniel? Only if Matthew himself adds this exhortation could the reader of the Gospel be intended by ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτω ("let the reader understand"). So Bruce comments, "In Christ's own mouth it would imply too much stress laid on Daniel's word as a guide, which indeed they are not."¹ Obviously, Bruce wishes to dismiss the importance of Daniel.

But that the reading is of Daniel and not the First Gospel seems assured, even if Matthew (or Mark) was responsible for the added comment. The Book of Daniel is specifically mentioned in the verse. A reference to the reading of Daniel is natural. The word ἀναγινώσκω is used elsewhere for the reading of the OT, even when no scriptural text is mentioned (e.g. Mark 2:25).² Furthermore, Carson notes that Jesus is the probable source of the saying since two Gospels, Matthew and Mark, have this comment.³ Masters is even more observant in perceiving an allusion to the saying in Luke as well. A lengthy quote is appropriate:

¹Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 292; cf. also Hooker, "Mark 13," p. 89.

²Ridderbos, Coming of the Kingdom, p. 532, note 81.

³Carson, "Matthew," p. 500.

Jesus' warning, "let the reader understand," echoes Daniel. In some cases Daniel understood a prophecy; in others, he heard but could not understand [12:8]. Verse ten of chapter twelve makes a contrast between the wise . . . and the wicked. . . . It is stated that "none of the wicked shall understand; but they that are wise shall understand." In the statement "let the reader understand," Jesus appealed to the reader of Daniel to exercise spiritual understanding in interpreting these events whose real significance was not generally discernible.

This is not merely a parenthetical remark inserted by the evangelist in the midst of Jesus' instructions to the disciples when to flee. Rather it is of primary importance in the train of the discourse. That this was an original statement in Jesus' teaching is evident from the fact that an equivalent form of it occurs in each of the three gospels. In place of "let him that readeth understand," Luke [21:20] gives, "But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand." When they see these things happening, they are to know the significance of this. It requires perception at this point to recognize that this is indeed the end of Jerusalem. In verses eleven and twelve of Daniel twelve, the setting up of the abomination marks the beginning of the final period. There is given there incentive to endure through it, in the statement, "Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days" [12:12]. In the statement, "let the reader understand," Jesus similarly pointed out the abomination of desolation as a critical stage in the chain of events.¹

¹Masters, "Eschatology of Jesus," pp. 48-49. The Hebrew word יָדָע ("understanding") or related terms appear 27 times in Daniel and are a theme related to the abomination of desolation; cf. the complex related to the vision in Dan 8:13,14 which includes 8:15,16,27; 9:22,23. Dan 9:24-27, a crucial section to all prophecy, shortly follows. Later references to "understanding" include 10:1,12; 11:33; 12:10. Rev 13:18 and 17:9 can be brought into this discussion. Both references make an appeal for wisdom. The former reference is especially relevant. After a discussion of the worship of the image of the beast, John writes, "Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding. . . ." Both verses have $\sigma\acute{o}\phi\omicron\varsigma$ and $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$. Cf. Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 212. The reader may have been a public reader in the early church, who like the scribes gave interpretation along with the reading

In actuality, the exact comment in Matthew and Mark ("let the reader understand") may be added by one or other of the two Gospel writers. They may have added the comment based on the actual words and thoughts Christ communicated about the abomination event. Luke's record shows that Jesus was concerned with understanding the significance of the event, as Masters points out. The critical point is this: an understanding of the abomination must be in line with Daniel's prophecy. Daniel contains three references (9:27; 11:31; 12:11) and an allusion (8:13) to the abomination of desolation. Some feel the most direct reference to which Jesus referred would be Daniel 12:1 because of numerous allusions to Daniel 11:40-12:13 surrounding the Matthew 24:15 section.¹ Others claim that Jesus' words have the most in common with Daniel 9:27.² For Walvoord, the Daniel 11:31 passage is fulfilled in Antiochus IV and the 9:27 and 12:11 references portray the Antichrist typified in Antiochus.³ This view demonstrates a unity between the passages certainly intended by the Holy Spirit through Daniel. As Ford notes, while 12:11 may be closer

(cf. Neh 8:8); Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 154.

¹Robert H. Gundry, The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 43.

²Beda Rigaux, "ΒΑΕΛΥΓΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΡΗΜΟΕΞΕΣ," Biblica 40 (1959):678-79; Ford, Abomination of Desolation, pp. 153-54.

³Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 318-20.

philologically to Matthew 24:15, philology alone is insufficient for interpretation. Matthew's statement is most probably a summary of Daniel's teaching on the subject which finds its central development in Daniel 9:27.¹ This leads to the conclusion that the abomination of desolation cannot be cut from its ties to the seventieth week of Daniel 9:27. If the seventieth week is future, the abomination is future.² Viewing the abomination of desolation as some part of the Roman invasion under Titus renders the Danielic background vapid.³

Second Thessalonians and Revelation

Not only is the abomination of desolation rooted in Daniel's seventieth week, it is indissolubly tied to the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians and the beast of Revelation. Shaw wishes to prove that the Olivet Discourse has little in common with 2 Thessalonians⁴ and

¹Ford, Abomination of Desolation, pp. 153-54.

²The logic of this connection may be what leads some like Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future, p. 255, to divorce Matt 24:15 from Daniel's concept of the abomination in order to confirm an A.D. 70 fulfillment. It is impossible for the A.D. 70 fulfillment to connect with Dan 9:27, where the one responsible for the abomination meets his end. Titus and the Romans meet with victory not demise.

³Beasley-Murray, "βδέλυγμα," p. 75 also states that Jesus viewed the abomination of desolation in light of the day of the Lord. If the day of the Lord is future, another argument is enlisted for an eschatological interpretation of Matt 24:15.

⁴Shaw, "Signs of the End," pp. 98-102.

Beasley-Murray dismisses the doctrine of the Antichrist as a later developed doctrine that should not be brought to bear on the 24:15 passage.¹ Such reasoning may overlook the unity of prophetic Scripture. There is a convincing compatibility between Daniel, Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians and Revelation on this subject.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, the man of lawlessness is 1) an individual, 2) whose revealing parallels an end-time apostasy, 3) who sets himself up as an object of worship in the temple of God, 4) whose seductive deceptions result in many sealing their destiny for the eternal judgment of God, and 5) whose revelation coincides with the time of the Parousia which will put an end to his dominion. Second Thessalonians, Matthew 24:15, and Matthew 24:10-12 must be joined to form a tightly knit web of truths concerning the eschatological apostasy, idolatry, lawlessness, deception, and Antichrist of the end-times.²

The masculine participle of Matthew 24:15 (ἐστώς) in the majority text and of Mark 13:14 (ἐστηκότα) in the majority and critical texts gives additional support to the

¹Beasley-Murray, "βδέλυγμα," p. 75.

²Wenham, "Matthew 24:10-12," pp. 160-61 states that Matt 24:10-12 describes similar matters to that of the abomination of desolation and may link with 2 Thess 2. He concludes that vv. 10-12 is a summary of the whole period of "great tribulation" depicted in vv. 9-28. Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 203, note 42 joins 24:10-12, 23-24 and 2 Thess 2.

conception of the Antichrist as the initiator of the abomination.¹ The most reasonable explanation of this grammatical construction is that the masculine ἐστώς in Matthew ("standing" in the holy place) points to a person. If the critical text is accepted with Matthew's neuter (ἐστός) and Mark's masculine participle (ἐστηκότα) it could be that Jesus thought of both a personal agent and an object.² The Book of Revelation does mention the worship of the beast (13:4,12) and the worship of an image or idol of the beast (13:14-15). The two are obviously separate entities (Rev 14:9,11; 15:2; 16:2). In 2 Thessalonians 2, however, the reference is clearly to the Antichrist taking his seat in the temple (v. 4).³ So even apart from the testimony of the Gospels, the abomination may be seen as both a person and an object. Since the abomination will be set up for 1290 days (Dan 12:11), it may well be that Antichrist personally proclaims himself to be God in the temple, but

¹Holding this opinion about Mark's masculine participle are McNeile, Matthew, p. 348; Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 175, note 4; Hooker, "Mark 13," p. 90. Ford, Abomination of Desolation, pp. 165-66 apparently sees the Roman army as a personified Antichrist. But he misses the whole import of the personal, end-time Antichrist when he asks how one person and one act could make men flee for their lives to the mountains. Ibid., p. 167.

²It could also be that the neuter participle ἐστός is neuter simply for grammatical reasons, i.e., to agree with its neuter antecedent τὸ βδέλυγμα.

³Foerster, "βδέλυγμα," p. 600.

is shortly replaced by his image.¹ Antiochus Epiphanes typologically fits this pattern. When he desecrated the Jerusalem temple, there is some evidence that he set up an image of Zeus, while at the same time viewing himself as a representative of the deity.² The man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians exemplifies that act.

If Revelation 13:14-15 speaks of the same event as Matthew 24:15, an eschatological interpretation becomes the only logical choice. Walvoord cogently reminds us, "As Revelation was written long after A.D. 70, it obviously could not be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem at that time. . . ." ³ Regardless of the date for the Book of Revelation, the nature of the eschatological beast conceptually parallels the abomination of Matthew, confirming Matthew's eschatological outlook.

Conclusion

The phrase "abomination of desolation" connotes an idolatrous and lawless act of sacrilege which spiritually

¹Cf. Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, p. 176; Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 320.

²Beasley-Murray, "τὸ βδέλυγμα," p. 75. The name "Epiphanes" comes from the title he assumed, Theo Epiphanes, meaning "the manifest God."

³Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 320. For a defense of the Domitian dating of Revelation, see D. Edmond Hiebert, An Introduction to the New Testament, 3 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 3:253-57; Robert H. Gundry, A Survey of the New Testament (rev. ed., 1970, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 345; cf. also Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Downers

devastates the temple in Jerusalem and leads to an attack on the city and the people of Judea. This view retains the natural meaning of the temple for the phrase, "the holy place."

Of the views that find a fulfillment of the abomination in A.D. 70, the view concerning the Roman standards on the Jewish soil of Jerusalem has the strongest support. But this view fails to maintain the proper order of abomination-tribulation-flight as described in Matthew. Appeal to Luke 21:20 is of no help. A closer look at the passage shows that Luke does not appear to refer to a totally different event or a totally identical event. Nor does it appear that Luke has reference to the A.D. 70 event. Instead, he depicts the eschatological war on Jerusalem connected with the future abomination of desolation. Luke 21:20, therefore, supports an eschatological approach to the abomination of desolation in Matthew.

Daniel's prophecy is paramount to the understanding of Matthew 24:15. The call to the reader to understand, is a call by the Evangelist or by Jesus Himself to comprehend the true significance of Daniel's prophecy concerning the abomination. Daniel's prophecy is invariably tied to the seventieth week of Daniel 9:27. This alliance points to a future fulfillment of Jesus' words. The "man of

lawlessness" doctrine of Paul in 2 Thessalonians and John's vision of the beast in Revelation confirm and illuminate a yet-to-come Antichrist who will personally exalt himself as deity in a rebuilt Jerusalem temple.¹ The masculine participle as it relates to the abomination event makes it possible that a personal Antichrist is intended. Given this conception, we are supplied with the reason why the sight of this abomination signals the near approach of the end. Daniel 9:27 states the abomination takes place in the middle of the seventieth week (half of a seven year period). Daniel 12:11 declares there will be 1290 days from the abomination to the end (slightly more than three-and-a-half years). The woman (Israel) of Revelation 12:6 flees and finds protection for 42 months. Taken together, the biblical revelation prophesies the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15 takes place in the middle of the Great Tribulation (the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation), instigating Jewish persecution and the flight of verse 16. Is it any wonder why this turning point in the Tribulation should constitute a sign of the end? Gould writes, "Wars and rumors of wars, as long as they keep away from the holy place, are not signs of the end, but when they attack the holy place, then beware."²

¹Walvoord, "Temple in Jerusalem?," pp. 104-5; McCall, "Tribulation Temple?," pp. 79-80.

²Gould, Mark, p. 246.

The Flight of Verses 16-22¹

The Flight Itself (v. 16)

At the sight of the abomination of desolation, all those in Judea are to flee in haste. Luke clearly includes those who are in the city (21:21). This fact is overlooked by some who wish to limit the command to those in the out-lying areas.² But why would the Lord warn only those outside the city of the need for hasty departure? Those inside the city were in great danger also.

Most commentators attempt to explain the flight as historically fulfilled from the city of Jerusalem itself. It is believed that a considerable number of Christians escaped Jerusalem and Judea to Pella in Decapolis. In the fourth century, Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History III. v. 2-3) recorded that the Christians made a quick departure to Pella when they were warned by a revelation from God. Here they took up their residence. A similar testimony is

¹Views that understand the flight in Matt to be highly symbolic are not discussed here. Among several is Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 10, who interprets the flight to mean Matthew's church must abandon Judaism; cf. also Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, pp. 323-36. The exegesis of the Discourse elsewhere seems to exclude such extreme symbolism. If the flight is symbolic, what do the details of vv. 16-20 represent? For example, what do the mountains symbolize, or the pregnant women and nursing mothers? And why pray that the flight might not be in winter or on the Sabbath? On the other hand, to understand an actual flight that results from literal persecution makes good sense.

²Tasker, Matthew, p. 229.

reproduced a century later by Epiphanius (Adversus Haereses XXIX. 7; De Mensuris et Ponderibus XV.). Epiphanius also mentions a similar flight to Pella in A.D. 135 just prior to Hadrian's reconstruction of Jerusalem. S. G. F. Brandon, for one, challenges the historicity of these accounts. He points out that Epiphanius contradicts himself, when he mentions on one occasion that Christ gave the warning in a revelation to the Christians but on another occasion angels were the source of the warning. Also, Eusebius says the flight was before the war, Epiphanius says it was before the fall of the city.¹ There are also problems with the dating of the flight.² The Christians (and many Jews) may have left as early as A.D. 68, but Josephus records an exodus in A.D. 66 (War II. xx. 1).³ Hendriksen is another to question the historical reliability of the Pella flight. He remarks:

Scholars who have made a special study of the early history of the Jerusalem church doubt this fourth century A.D. report [of Eusebius and Epiphanius]. They tell us that a. in order at this time to get to Pella, believers would have had to break their way through lines of Roman soldiers; b. the people left in Pella were filled with bitter hatred against all Jews, including Christian Jews; c. Pella could not have provided housing for all the refugees; and d. if the escape had been attempted at a slightly earlier date, the

¹S. G. F. Brandon, The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church (London: SPCK, 1951), pp. 168-70.

²Ibid.; Carson, "Matthew," p. 501.

³Broadus, Matthew, p. 487.

Christians would have fallen into the hostile hands of the fanatical Jewish freedom-fighters.¹

Pella is located sixty miles northeast of Jerusalem (the journey may have been 100 miles long²). Alford, using the ἐπὶ reading (found in the majority text) rather than εἰς, reasons that Pella is over the mountains even though it is not in the mountains. But while the majority text has ἐπὶ (v. 16), the parallel in Mark (13:14) and Luke (21:21) have εἰς in both critical and majority texts.³ It is seemingly impossible for Pella to fit the needed description of being in the mountains.⁴ McNeile takes a similar position when he states, "Pella was not in the mountains, but at the foot of the eastern range, in the Jordan Valley, . . . and would be reached by traveling up the valley."⁵ If McNeile is correct concerning the path of travel the refugees may have taken, Pella does not even appear to qualify for flight over or on the mountains (ἐπὶ). With this data in mind, the prediction and command may be rightly

¹Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 858.

²Tasker, Matthew, p. 230.

³If the majority text is right, both the journey (ἐπὶ in Matt) and the destination (εἰς in Mark, Luke) seem to be in the mountains. This would not exclude the possibility of going through valleys. But a route on the mountains would certainly afford greater safety.

⁴Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 133. Εἰς can also mean "toward" (BAGD, p. 227), but from Jerusalem Pella is toward the valley rather than toward the mountains.

⁵McNeile, Matthew, p. 348.

held to await a future event.

What of the localization of the commands? Do they not preclude an eschatological event? Are not the details "too limited geographically and culturally" to justify their application to the coming Tribulation?¹ Would not the command to flee be useless at the end-times?² Again, many of the answers to these questions can only come from the integration of the total prophetic revelation. In Revelation 12:6,14 Israel (symbolically represented by a woman) will flee into the wilderness where she will be sustained for 1260 days. In response, Satan will launch an anti-Semitic campaign (v. 13).³ The place of refuge will be in both a mountainous region (Matt 24:16; Mark 13:14; Isa 33:16) and in the wilderness (Rev 12:6,14).⁴ If Christ cannot return to set up His kingdom until the Jews acknowledge Him as their Messiah (Matt 23:39; Hos 5:15), is it any wonder that Satan, knowing his time is short, will attempt

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 499; cf. Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 191.

²Cf. Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 40-42. Woolery cites Rev 6:15-17 where it is said that no one is able to hide from the presence of the coming Lord; Ibid., p. 42. This view misunderstands the purpose of the flight in Matt 24:16. In Matt, the Jews flee from the Antichrist; in Rev, unbelievers hide from God. The Matthean escape from the Antichrist could both be possible and essential.

³Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, pp. 196-97.

⁴For a defense of the position that the Tribulation Jews escape to Bozrah (or Petra), see Ibid., pp. 201-4.

to exterminate the Jews (Rev 12:13-14).¹ Since even in our day the Jews have returned to Palestine (in unbelief) as the OT has prophesied,² the limitations of geography and culture are not difficult to explain for an eschatological approach. It should not be overlooked that the flight is for believers (the disciples are addressed, v. 20, ἡ φυγή ὑμῶν), but also for all who are in Judea (v. 16). It would appear valid to include unbelieving Jews.³

The Details of the Flight (vv. 17-20)

Those who happen to be on the rooftop are directed not to come down to get anything from their house. The thought is not likely a command to flee on the housetops. Instead, it is probably a command to descend by the customary outside stairway, rather than to delay one's flight by descending the inside stairway so as to retrieve any personal belongings.⁴ Those in the fields are not to return

¹There are several examples, both biblical (e.g. Esther 3:6,13) and extra-biblical (the German Holocaust), of such an attempt.

²Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, pp. 65-69.

³Masters, "Eschatology of Jesus," p. 50. In conversations with Dr. Louis Goldberg, Professor of Jewish Studies at Moody Bible Institute, the author has been told that it is a regular requirement in Israeli public schools to study one of the Synoptic Gospels of the NT. Unbelieving Jews may indeed know and heed Jesus' command to flee.

⁴Cf. Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 195; Alford, Four Gospels, p. 240.

for their outer garments,¹ probably left behind to facilitate freedom of movement. Somehow both the winter and the Sabbath would restrict a hasty withdrawal. Winter could mean bad weather conditions: either the cold and snow in the mountains would hamper travel² and involve exposure or rain in the winter months could easily cause flash floods along any wadis that may be crossed.³ To say that the A.D. 70 encampment of Titus was not in the winter⁴ misses the point. Jesus said for the disciples to pray that their flight might not be in winter. Since the exact date of the flight to Pella is unknown, an historical fulfillment of this statement cannot be substantiated. But there is also nothing in the text that directly states either that such a prayer will be prayed or that it will be answered.

The reference to the Sabbath has drawn much of the attention by expositors. Does this imply that Jewish believers would still be observing the Sabbath until Jerusalem is destroyed in A.D. 70? "It was indeed this event,"

¹The plural τὰ ἱμάτια (v. 18) appears in the majority text. On first glance this would appear as an obvious error if the outer garment is in view. Each person would generally have laid aside one outer garment to work freely in the fields. But the plural is sometimes put when a single garment is understood, e.g. Matt 26:65; John 13:4, 12; Acts 18:6. Cf. BAGD, p. 376.

²Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 321.

³Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, p. 178; Gundry, Matthew, p. 483.

⁴Broadus, Matthew, p. 487.

comments Broadus, "that first made the Jewish Christians clearly understand the ceremonial law to be no longer binding. . . ."¹ But Acts 15 suggests this reasoning is inadequate. The Jerusalem Council settled the issue of the binding relationship of the law for NT believers much earlier than A.D. 70. If unbelieving Jews are involved in the flight as was previously implied, then perhaps the Sabbath may invoke religious scruples.² But another explanation is possible. Should the flight fall on a Sabbath, transportation and travel might be restricted due to the opposition of other Jews or national laws.³ Or it may be that travel would be quite obvious and lead to capture.⁴

Gundry thinks that the flight on the Sabbath presumes that church saints of the Tribulation are described, encountering opposition in their escape because of

¹Ibid., p. 488; cf. Alford, Four Gospels, p. 240.

²Midrash Rabbah on Num 23 gives permission for flight from Gentiles on the Sabbath. But during the Maccabean revolt, many Jews died rather than flee from Antiochus on the Sabbath (1 Macc 2:29-38). It is also of passing interest to note that Mattathias and his sons fled to the mountains when Antiochus desecrated the temple (1 Macc 1:54).

³Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, p. 178 cites the Yom Kippur War of 1973 as a current example. Public transportation was totally shut down when the Arabs attacked, causing the mobilization of military to be stifled. This may be the right interpretation. Yet, the question may be raised as to whether such a situation might not be an advantage for those who flee.

⁴Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 321.

Rabbinical Sabbath laws.¹ But the existence of such opposition cannot be deduced to identify any one group. Apart from other factors, anyone who would violate such regulations, including Jewish non-church saints, could fit the description.²

The Great Tribulation (vv. 21-22)

Verse 21 is introduced by an illative γάρ. Any hesitations concerning the seriousness of the abomination of desolation and the compelling exigency to flee are now removed. This is to be a time of "great tribulation" (v. 21). The term could be a general term for suffering and trials unconnected with Revelation 7:14.³ But what motive is there for denying that θαλίς μεγάλη is virtually a technical term for the last half of Daniel's seventieth week?⁴ Revelation 7:14 correlates so easily with its mention of persecuted saints. In addition, Matthew 24:21 has close verbal ties with Daniel 12:1 (cf. also Jer 30:7; Deut 4:30-31).⁵ In the Danielic context of 11:36-12:1b,

¹Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 133.

²Ware, "Church in Matthew 24?," p. 165.

³Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 86.

⁴The Lukan parallel, 21:22 replaces "great tribulation" with "days of vengeance." This is equally an eschatological phrase pointing to the day of the Lord (Isa 61:2b [cf. Luke 4:18-21]; 34:8; Jer 46:10).

⁵Gundry, Matthew, p. 484; Thomas Francis Glasson, "Mark xiii. and the Greek Old Testament," ExpTim 69

Antichrist (the self-willed king of v. 36) exercises his power over the world, climaxing in an end-time persecution of Israel never before matched.¹ If Daniel 12:1 is the passage to which Matthew refers, it is clear that Matthew has in mind the eschatological Tribulation.²

Josephus claimed that the Jewish war was the most devastating war of all times (War I. i. 1). But it is unlikely he would claim that that moment of history involved tribulation "such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall." Is this not much more than hyperbolic language?³ If the last days of the world as we know it are to be the worst of all human history, how else could the Lord have stated it than with the exact words recorded here? The severity of this time corresponds with the severity of the judgments of Revelation, where from the fourth seal (6:8) and the sixth trumpet (9:15) alone one-half of the entire world's population

(1957-58):214. It is striking that Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 206 would deny this and suggest instead the verse could be drawn from the Dead Sea Scrolls or the pseudepigraphal works.

¹George M. Harton, "An Interpretation of Daniel 11:36-45," GTJ 4 (1983):206-7; cf. John F. Walvoord, Daniel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), pp. 282-83.

²Cf. Hooker, "Mark 13," p. 90.

³Contra Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 208; Broadus, Matthew, p. 488. N.B. that Broadus writes in 1886, before the great Holocaust of Germany.

meets death.¹ Could the A.D. 70 event have led to the death of all mankind (πάντα σάρξ) as is implied in verse 23? Such statements prohibit limiting the distress to the number of deaths in any one city, as Carson does: "There have been greater numbers of deaths--six million in the Nazi death camps, mostly Jews, and an estimated twenty million under Stalin--but never so high a percentage of a great city's population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem."² The words of another can summarize the Matthean perspective:

Surely the persecutions of Rome or the sufferings endured by the Christians during the Reformation would far outstrip the siege and the destruction of Jerusalem as far as suffering is concerned for Christians. Even if the "elect" are Jews, the sufferings of the Jews during World War II, where over six million Jews lost

¹Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 321.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 501. Carson also contends that if Jesus' remark had the Tribulation in mind, his words would be meaningless since the millennium follows this end-time. So why would He say that great distress would never take place again? Ibid., p. 501. Carson most likely misses the intention of the phrase, οὐδ' οὐ μὴ γένηται. The terminus a quo for the thought is not the Tribulation, but the time of Christ's speaking. He said that "there will be great tribulation such as has not occurred . . . until now" (ἕως τοῦ νῦν), i.e., until the moment of His words, "nor ever shall," i.e., from His words up to the end of human history. From the "now" of Christ's statement to the "nor ever shall" involves a multitude of historical possibilities. In passing, it is also worth noting the uniquely repetitive use of οὐ(μὴ) in this verse; C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 157. The grammar is emphatic (cf. Heb 13:5).

their lives, rules out the siege as the worst disaster ever.¹

If the "great tribulation" of verse 21 is understood as a reference to the A.D. 70 event, a break in the chronological flow of the text is usually observed. Many commentators with this understanding find the break between verses 28 and 29. Carson finds the break between verses 21 and 22. In his view, verses 15-21 describe a specific time of distress within the general distress of the interadvent age. Verse 22 returns to the general distress of the interadvent age.² But if the text reveals a break at verse 22, the break is supremely subtle; the text uses only an introductory καί. Also working against this exegesis is the phrase "those days" (αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκεῖναι). The phrase is used twice in verse 22, but it is also used in verse 19 tying verse 22 with 15-21! Carson's answer is that "those days" are not limited to the great distress of A.D. 70 but stretch from the time of Christ to the Second Coming.³

It may be agreed that the terminus ad quem for the phrase, "those days," is basically correct as the Second Coming. For according to verse 29 linked with Mark 13:24

¹Richard H. Minehart, "The Manner of Shortening the Days of Matthew 24:22 and Mark 13:20" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1978), p. 26.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 502.

³Ibid.; cf. also Kingsbury, "Matthew," p. 16; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 205.

("But in those days, after the tribulation . . .") the Parousia takes place within "those days." The question is whether "those days" begins with the time of Christ (or the A.D. 70 event). If Carson's interpretation of the phrase is accurate--that the "great tribulation" is equal to the A.D. 70 war on Jerusalem (vv. 15-21)--why is it the time right before the Messiah's return (or the interadvent period leading to His return) which needs to be "cut short" (v. 22)? It is much more logical, to say the least, that the cutting short would be necessary for the very time of the "great tribulation" itself. Besides this, the Lord Jesus announced that great sorrow and affliction would come to those women who were pregnant and nursing "in those days" (v. 19). Is this true throughout the interadvent age? And is it not less problematic to view the phrase "in those days" in light of its OT eschatological use where the day of the Lord (Joel 2:29ff.; 3:1ff.; Zech 8:6ff.) or the beginning of the millennial blessings for Israel (Jer 31:29, 33; 33:15,16; Zech 8:15,23) are addressed?¹ Since Daniel's seventieth week has been shown to be the chronology of 24:15-21, an eschatological view of 24:22ff. merely moves along the same course.

Those who would find in verse 22 an historical fulfillment during the destruction of Jerusalem offer several

¹Cf. Cranfield, "Mark 13," p. 301.

factors which show the days of the siege were cut short. They include: 1) Herod Agrippa's proposed strengthening of the walls of Jerusalem in A.D. 42-43 was cancelled (Josephus, Antiquities XIX. vii. 2); 2) Jewish factions destroyed food and provisions which resulted in premature famine and death (Josephus, War V. i. 4); 3) an early arrival of Titus' army at the beginning of the siege caused Jews to abandon several fortifications (War VI. viii. 4);¹ and 4) the Jewish forces lacked leadership and fortitude.² It is further claimed that even Titus confessed that only God could have helped him conquer such a strong city (War VI. ix. 1).³ Therefore, the siege lasted only 134 days instead of a more extended time, and the Romans conquered Jerusalem more quickly and with less casualties.

Minehart has discerned a serious flaw in this conclusion. If the "elect" (v. 22) are the Christians who escaped the siege to Pella, what need is there for shortening those days?

Without Christians in the city the point of shortening of the days is lost. The purpose of shortening the time was so that some might survive. Even making the

¹Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 41.

²Minehart, "Matthew 24:22," p. 22.

³Alford, Four Gospels, p. 241; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 41. It seems strange that a pagan such as Titus, who allowed his soldiers to worship his image on their military standards, would give credit to God (or some monotheistic god) as Josephus records.

Jews "the elect" brings about problems. Every person in Jerusalem and environs could have perished, and yet, because of the large number of Jews scattered throughout the world, many Jews would have survived.¹

Consequently, the words "all flesh" cannot be limited to all the people in the Jewish War, as some believe.² Would the Jewish War have resulted in the death of all the people in Judea including the Romans? Or if "all flesh" of the nation is meant,³ what restricts the phrase "all flesh" to the Jews? Instead, the phrase most naturally means all mankind without restrictions of any kind.

How are the days shortened?⁴ Three possibilities exist. Perhaps the day would be shorter than the full twenty-four hours.⁵ If "those days" include the second half of the Tribulation as was decided above, this would mean less than twenty-four hour days for a three and one-half year interval. This suggestion appears improbable. Gundry⁶ and Rand⁷ posit that the second-half of the

¹Minehart, "Matthew 24:22," p. 26.

²Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 211.

³Alford, Four Gospels, p. 241; Summers, "Matthew 24," p. 506.

⁴Verse 22 contains a chiasm: a) cut short; b) no flesh saved; a¹) elect saved; b¹) cut short.

⁵McNeile, Matthew, p. 350; MacDonald, Matthew, p. 271.

⁶Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 42; also implied by Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 209.

⁷Rand, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 55, 191.

Tribulation itself is shortened from its three and one-half year length. But this denies the truthfulness of those passages which predict the specific time of the last half of the Tribulation to be a time, times and half a time (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:14), forty-two months (Rev 11:2; 13:5), or 1260 days (Rev 11:3; 12:6). As Sproule notes, this interpretation makes Daniel's seventieth week prophecy go unfulfilled and "minimizes the fact that the Jewish remnant must be given over to the Antichrist for a full [original emphasis] 1260 days (the second half of Daniel's seventieth week) as plainly predicted. . . ."¹ Gundry seems to imply that Jesus' prophecy reinterprets or corrects Daniel's prophecy.² But this must be rejected. The Book of Revelation, which confirms the precise length of the seventieth week of Daniel, was written long after Jesus spoke these words.

The best explanation as to the method of the shortening is to understand it as a divine intervention in the diabolical affairs of the Antichrist so that God's fixed period of the seventieth week terminates just in time to prevent a total extermination of the human race.³ Another

¹Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," p. 64, note 1.

²Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 42.

³Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 321; cf. McNeile, Matthew, p. 350.

way of saying this is that those days were shortened with regard to the purpose and power of the oppressors¹ and not with regard to God's foreordained plan. Fuller, whose view of this unit is more historical, makes the following observation which is applicable to the eschatological approach just discussed.

It ought not to be thought that God was faced with an unexpected situation which demanded a change in His eternal plan. The verb that is used here is aorist ("shortened") and suggests that whatever action was involved on the part of God was in His original program. . . . Matthew uses an aorist ("except those days had been shortened") and a future verb ("those days shall be shortened"), thus showing the relation of the past and eternal course of God and its yet future out-working in history.²

It is probably not the mere use of the aorist which suggests the eternal plan of God, but the fact that the aorist here is used proleptically of a certain future event. Given this slight clarification, Fuller's point is accurate. Therefore, two decrees of God--the precise length of the seventieth week and the divine shortening of those days--must both be fulfilled. The Tribulation itself runs its full course since Christ returns after it (v. 29). But "those days," which extend beyond the Tribulation (cf. Mark 13:24), are cut short.

The reason for the shortening of those days may be complex. One reason is to prevent the total extermination

¹Delling, "κολοβόω," pp. 823-24.

²Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 210.

of the human race ("all flesh," v. 22). This is valid if σώζω ("saved") is taken to be a physical deliverance. Many expositors feel this is the case, regardless of the use of the same verb in 24:13.¹ But since the Great Tribulation (second half of the seventieth week) initiates not only persecution and martyrdom (Satanic wrath) and worldwide catastrophies (divine judgments of Revelation), but also Satanic deceptions and an apostasy epitomized in the abomination of desolation, could it be that a divine shortening of those days is part of the spiritual protection of the elect? Masters sees in verse 22 a spiritual salvation.

She writes:

Thus in those days the signs and wonders presented as proofs by imposters are so convincing that they would beguile even the elect, but for the sustaining power of God. The extremity of the situation is indicated both in the fact that, to preserve the elect God shortens the period, and that the signs and wonders have the potential of deceiving even the elect.²

As in 24:13, it may not be intended that we choose one kind of preservation against the other. The "elect" are certainly those who have spiritual deliverance. But a physical deliverance in this context cannot be denied either.

It remains to determine the identity of the "elect" (ἐκλεκτοί, v. 22). If the time of the fulfillment of the verse is the future Tribulation, two answers are possible:

¹Ibid., pp. 211-12; Delling, "κολοβόω," pp. 823-24.

²Masters, "Eschatology of Jesus," p. 52.

1) believing Jews and Gentiles as members of the church; or
 2) believing non-church Jews (or non-church Jews and Gentiles) of the Tribulation. The word "elect" occurs in 24:22,24 and 30. In all three instances the article is used. This is true of the parallels in Mark as well (13:20, 22,27). The other uses of ἐκλεκτός in the Gospels reveal two references to Christ (Luke 23:35; John 1:34) and two anarthrous references to people (Matt 22:14; 20:16 majority text). One other reference, Luke 18:7, has the article and defines the elect as a group of believers that will be delivered by Christ at His Second Coming. It may be significant that the article is so consistently used where the group is definitely a group of Tribulation saints. In the Epistles, ἐκλεκτός does refer to church saints (Col 3:12; Titus 1:1). In the only use of the word in Romans, a probable reference to church saints appears, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" (8:33). But the use of ἐκλεκτός here seems preparatory for the discussion of the Jews in God's plan and may have a double intention. Most likely, the Roman Christians believed God had permanently set aside the Jews (cf. 11:1) and therefore were looking at the Jews with disdain, i.e., "bringing a charge against God's [Jewish] elect." While ἐκλεκτός does not appear in Paul's discussion of God's dealings with Israel (Rom 9-11), ἐκλογή ("election, choice") appears four times (9:11; 11:5, 7,28) but nowhere else in the book. In each case it has

reference to Israel.¹ This evidence suggests that it would not be out of place for ἐκλεκτός to refer to Jewish saints.

If those who heard Christ's prophecy on the Mount of Olives were to understand His words, they would have understood them in terms of the OT and not the NT. References to the elect in the OT speak of Israel (Ps 89:3; 105:6; Isa 41:8,9; 43:20) and prophesy of the faithful Jewish remnant of the end-time (Isa 65:9). The fact that a Jewish remnant is to be delivered from the catastrophies of the last days is well established in the OT revelation (Isa 4:2; 10:20-23; 37:31-32; Joel 2:32; Obad 17). "The latter parts of the book of Zechariah speak of a remnant which will be purified (Zech 13:8f), and which will survive on the day when the nations [note the plural] assemble to fight against Jerusalem (14:2 linked with apocalyptic ideas about the day of Yahweh)."² The faithful remnant

will comprise the majority of the one third of the nation that will survive the tribulation [Zech 13:8,9]. Throughout the tribulation they will be unbelievers as far as the Messiahship of Jesus is concerned and also unbelievers as far as the Antichrist is concerned.³

When all these passages are brought to bear on the use of "elect" in the Discourse, the impression is that the word points to Jewish believers. The disciples, who are Jewish,

¹NIDNTT, s.v. "ἐκλέγομαι," by L. Coenen, 1:540.

²NIDNTT, s.v. "λεῖμμα," by W. Günther and H. Krienke, 3:250.

³Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, p. 199.

have just been addressed (v. 20), and this in connection with all those in Judea (v. 16)--an obvious Jewish reference.

Moo, for one, strongly opposes the meaning of "elect" as restricted to the Jews. He argues that it is consistently used in the NT for the church. He concludes: "There is no verse in which there is indication that any restriction is in mind. Nor is there any hint of such a restriction in meaning in the Olivet Discourse."¹ But the word *ἐκλεκτός* has a variety of referents including angels (1 Tim 5:21) and Christ (Luke 23:35). It certainly is not exclusively used of the church. And the evidence layed out above establishes good reasons that the Discourse is limiting the word to Jewish believers of the Tribulation. What is more, Matthew, as the only Gospel to make specific mention of the *ἐκκλησία*, (16:18; 18:17), has chosen on three occasions in the Discourse to use *ἐκλεκτός* instead. If the "elect" are church saints, this is a strange absence of the word *ἐκκλησία*.

While this study concludes that "elect" pictures Jewish non-church saints of the Tribulation, it should be remembered that to include Gentiles in the term does not ipso facto involve the church. For even Walvoord, who rejects the presence of the church in the Tribulation,

¹Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 194.

takes the "elect" to be both Jew and Gentile believers of that period.¹ However, since there are no clear uses of ἐκλεκτός in the OT or NT where non-church Jews and Gentiles are intended, a non-church Jewish remnant may be the better meaning of the word in the Olivet Discourse.

Deception Concerning Christ's Appearance

(vv. 23-28)

As in the 9-14 unit, deceptions are again highlighted, especially deceptions concerning the location of the returning Messiah. Once again a section of the Discourse is introduced by τότε (v. 23). As has been shown, τότε is frequently sequential in the Discourse (vv. 9,10, 14). In the 15-28 pericope, τότε appears in verses 16, 21 and 23. The use in verse 16 is candidly sequential: at the sight of the abomination of desolation, the response to follow must be a hurried escape. But at verse 21 the τότε best takes on the meaning, "at that time." The "great tribulation" discussed in that verse cannot refer to any other than the Tribulation brought about by the abomination of desolation. With the prediction (v. 22) that those days will be cut short for the sake of the elect, the reader is again taken to the final end of human history. The Parousia itself will be God's method of shortening those days. It is right before the Parousia, during the Great Tribulation,

¹Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 326.

that men will most likely be deceived into believing that the Messiah has returned. Therefore, the $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$ in verse 23 naturally reflects an "at that time" significance, i.e., at the time of the Great Tribulation just prior to the Parousia.¹

A few scholars make a transition at verse 23 from the A.D. 70 event to the subject of the Second Coming by taking the $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$ there as sequential.² Therefore, a prophetic gap is placed between verses 22 and 23. The necessity for this more drastic exegesis is relieved if the preceding material (vv. 15-22) is given its full eschatological force. In addition, the "elect" for which those days are shortened must be the same "elect" which are potential targets of deception in verse 24. It is unlikely that two different groups are to be called to the reader's attention. Even those who take verses 15-28 as referring to the historical fall of Jerusalem are more consistent in uniting the 15-22 with the 23-28 unit.³

The Great Tribulation will be characterized by the presence of false Christs and false prophets. The two are

¹In agreement with taking the $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$ in vv. 21 and 23 as generally coincident with the preceding are the NASB and Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 92.

²Lange, *Matthew*, p. 426; cf. also others who feel the 23-28 passage at least goes beyond the fall of Jerusalem; Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 111; Beasley-Murray, "Second Thoughts," p. 417.

³For example, Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 219; Roark, "Eschatological Discourse," pp. 126-27.

thought by some to be synonymous terms.¹ But just as the false prophet of Revelation is distinguished from the beast or Antichrist (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), one can easily conceive of a distinction between "false prophets" and "false Christs." Who, then, are the false Christs? Are they identical with the antichrists of 1 John (2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7)² or are they to be differentiated?³ The antichrists, epitomized in The Antichrist, are specifically described in John's Epistle as those who deny the deity of Christ (2:22; 4:3). The man of lawlessness, Paul's terminology for the Antichrist, opposes God and all forms of the worship of God (2 Thess 2:4). But the force of *ψευδο* in "false Christs" (*ψευδόχριστοι*) carries its normal meaning of falsely pretending to be that which is real. "The *ψευδόχριστος* does not deny the being of Christ; on the contrary, he builds on the world's expectations of such a person; only he appropriates these to himself, blasphemously affirms that he is the foretold One, in whom God's promises and men's expectations are fulfilled."⁴

¹Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 44; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 221.

²Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 220.

³ZPEB, s.v. "False Christ," by J. E. Rosscup, 2:494-95; Richard C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), pp. 105-9; Broadus, Matthew, pp. 488-89; McNeile, Matthew, p. 350.

⁴Trench, Synonyms, p. 108.

Apparently, the false Christs or false Messiahs are those who claim to fulfill the role of Israel's Deliverer as described in the OT. Jesus may not be thinking so much of those who will claim to be the returning Jesus¹ as of those claiming to be the coming Messiah of Israel. The terms ψευδοπροφῆται and ψευδόχριστοι primarily relate to God's program with the Jews.² For example, the use of the term "false prophet" suggests that OT false prophets are to be distinguished from NT false teachers (2 Pet 2:1). In the only use of the term in Acts, the false prophet Bar-Jesus is declared to be Jewish (Acts 13:6). Though not exclusively limited to Jewish concerns (cf. 1 John 4:1), the term is certainly used of a Jewish national problem (Luke 6:26). Even the fact that these deceivers produce great signs and wonders (σημεῖα μεγάλα καὶ τέρατα, v. 24) gives a Jewish coloring to the text. Jesus told the Jews, "Unless you people see signs and wonders (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα), you simply will not believe" (John 4:4-8). Paul stated the same truth: "For indeed Jews ask for a sign . . ." (1 Cor 1:22; cf. also Matt 12:38,39; 16:1,4). Therefore, "false prophets" and "false Messiahs" probably suggest Jewish concerns.

The focus of the deceivers' signs are directed toward all men, but even (καί) toward the Jewish elect

¹Cf. 2 Cor 11:4 where Paul uses the term "another Jesus."

²Ware, "Church in Matthew 24?," pp. 168-69.

(v. 24). The ὥστε πλανῆσαι ("to deceive") construction, i.e., ὥστε plus the infinitive, is mostly used to describe intended results rather than actual results.¹ Why are these deceivers intent on leading astray the elect? It may be surmised that the elect are unbelieving Jews, who, when they believe, will express the very prayers that bring Christ's return (Luke 18:6-8; Matt 23:39). It may be, then, that the intended deceptions are designed to prevent the unbelieving Jews from believing in the one true Messiah. The "if possible" phrase looks at the hopes of the deceivers in their efforts, which will be thwarted by the sovereignty of God's election. Yet, it must be admitted that the elect may be believers at the time of the intended deceptions.

The nature of the deception is to lead men to believe that the Messiah has come (v. 23). McNeile believes that the announcement that the Messiah has arrived is spoken by the deceived and not the deceivers.² But it is also possible that false prophets make these announcements, pointing men to various locations where the (false) Messiah(s) might be. Since the text warns against anyone (τις) who might say this, both the deceived and the deceivers are potential candidates. The locations will be quite secretive. Jesus

¹Ernest D. Burton, Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1976), p. 99.

²McNeile, Matthew, p. 350.

gave examples of the wilderness or an inner room (v. 26). It was a quite common view of the Jews that the Messiah would come to the wilderness to deliver His chosen people. As Kittel notes, "This belief led revolutionary Messianic movements to make for the ἔρημος (Ac 21:28). It also explains Mt. 24:26 . . . and the flight of the woman into the ἔρημος in Rev. 12:6,14."¹ The whole concept is rooted in the OT eschatological schema (Hos 2:14; Num 24:17).² This explains the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness³--the one who is an earnest of the Elijah to come (Matt 11:14).⁴

The "inner room" (ταμεῖον, v. 26) may refer to a storeroom or to an "innermost hidden or secret room" (Matt 6:6; Luke 12:3).⁵ Contextually, this is desirable because of the contrast with the universally visible return of the Lord (v. 27). There is a very high degree of unanimity among expositors that the flashing lightning describes Christ's widely visible and undisguised appearance. Implied in the saying is that His return will be worldwide, rather

¹TDNT, s.v. "ἔρημος," by Gerhard Kittel, 2:658-59.

²Ibid., p. 659.

³Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 224.

⁴Kaiser, "Elijah," pp. 230-33.

⁵BAGD, p. 803.

than local,¹ public rather than private, and immediately known to all rather than having the necessity of others to report it.² So the disciples (and who they represent) are commanded not to go out (ἐξέλθῃτε, v. 26) to meet the Messiah.³

Needless to say, an A.D. 70 fulfillment of this passage (23-28) cannot be supported. Josephus did state that deceivers led many into the wilderness (Antiquities XX. viii. 8,10) and that there were deceivers at the time of the

¹McNeile, Matthew, p. 351.

²Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 224-25.

³The parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13) is significant in that it twice mentions going out (ἐξέρχομαι, vv. 1,6) to meet the Bridegroom. The contrasts with the rapture of the church are difficult to avoid. Not only is there no impression of going out to meet Christ at the rapture, there is also no thought of delay which is frequently mentioned with regard to Christ's Second Coming (25:5; cf. 24:22). All ten virgins rested while the Bridegroom delayed (perhaps the Jewish peace of the first half of the Tribulation) but at the midnight call (v. 6, perhaps the abomination of desolation at the middle of the Tribulation) they were told that the Bridegroom was coming. Only five had the spiritual reserve to actually meet their Deliverer. These entered the millennial wedding feast (v. 10). For the church saints who await the rapture, it is evil to say in one's heart that Christ has delayed His return (24:48) because His return for the church is imminent. On the other hand, we must so invest our "talents" as to prepare for a lifetime should the rapture not take place in the near future (25:19). These factors, as well as others unmentioned convince the author that the direct interpretation of the parable of the servants (24:45-51) and the parable of the talents (25:14-30) address the church, but the parable of the virgins addresses Israel in the Tribulation. Once again, the content of the parables and not who the disciples represent determines the interpretation of the parables.

Jewish War (War II. xiii. 4; VI. v. 2). Broadus confirms the existence of false prophets as Josephus has recorded, but feels that no indication is given that they performed great signs and wonders.¹ Concerning false Messiahs, there is no historical evidence at all before A.D. 70, even though some² wish to suggest their existence is possible without historical record of it. In contrast, false prophets are predicted to be at work before the Second Coming (cf. Zech 13:2).

What is the meaning of verse 28? As with many other verses in the Olivet Discourse, a wide range of interpretations are offered. They may be summarized very briefly: 1) the word "eagles" (οἱ ἄετοί) is a veiled allusion to the Roman eagle of the Roman standard, suggesting that the Roman army would swoop down upon the corpse (τὸ πτώμα) of the city and nation;³ 2) the faithful believers are drawn to Christ as their Author of life, to gain their spiritual nourishment;⁴ 3) as birds of prey appear when carrion is

¹Broadus, Matthew, p. 489.

²Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 45. Those, like Bar Kochba, who appeared after A.D. 70, cannot be used in connection with an A.D. 70 fulfillment.

³Tasker, Matthew, pp. 225, 230; cf. Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 294; Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 12.

⁴John Calvin, A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke and the Epistles of James and Jude, vol. 3 of Calvin's Commentaries, trans. A. W. Morrison, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 92.

present, so the signs of the Parousia will become visible when the Parousia is near;¹ 4) "where there is wickedness and moral corruption, judgment must come";² 5) events will transpire when the occasion for them exists, i.e., in God's own time;³ 6) the saying is symbolic of the death of Judaism after A.D. 70 or of the death of Christ;⁴ 7) literal birds of prey will feed on the carcasses left behind at the Battle of Armageddon;⁵ 8) the Parousia will be just as recognizable as a vulture recognizes a carcass;⁶ and 9) false prophets will come upon Jerusalem to devour it.⁷

Several exegetical factors narrow the options considerably. It can hardly be that believers feed on Christ as a vulture feeds on a dead body (#2). The word *ἀέτος* is

¹Hill, Matthew, p. 322.

²Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 323; cf. Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 861; Allen, Matthew, pp. 257-58.

³Broadus, Matthew, p. 489.

⁴W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, Matthew: Introduction, Translation and Notes, in the AB, eds. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1971), p. 296. The authors prefer the first choice.

⁵Archer in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 125; cf. Alford, Four Gospels, p. 242.

⁶Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 322; Summers, "Matthew 24," p. 506; Wilson, "Second Coming," p. 72; NIDNTT, s.v. "πάρουσα," by W. Bauder, 1:610.

⁷Lenski, Matthew, p. 923.

more likely to mean vultures here than eagles.¹ Therefore, any allusion to the Roman eagle may be set aside (#1). Alford is correct in perceiving that the stress falls upon "wherever . . . there" (ὅπου ἔάν . . . ἐκεῖ).² The parallel in Luke 17:37 bears out this stress. There the same proverb is used by Jesus to answer the disciples' question of "Where, Lord?" Combined with these thoughts is the fact that a γάρ appears in the majority text, uniting verse 28 with the Lord's description of His coming as lightning in verse 27.

First of all, these findings point toward a proverbial expression (cf. Job 39:30) which in Matthew accents the truth that the Second Coming of Christ cannot be missed just as a vulture will not miss carrion. This indirectly answers the thought of where. But can more precision be delineated? Perhaps. There is a curious similarity to Revelation 19:17-21 which suggests that the Lord's return primarily occurs in conjunction with the Campaign of Armageddon where the nations of the world gather to fight against the Lamb. At this campaign, the birds will feed upon those destroyed by the sword coming out of the mouth of the King of kings. It could be that the Lord's proverbial remark hints at the fact that He will return to the place where the vultures

¹BAGD, p. 19; Carson, "Matthew," p. 502.

²Alford, Four Gospels, p. 242.

will feast on those put to death at His coming, i.e., to the whole land of Palestine where the Campaign of Armageddon is fought.

Conclusion

It has been argued that Matthew 24:4-14 unfolds a panorama of the Tribulation period from beginning to end. By the literary technique of recapitulation, 24:15 returns to the midpoint of the Tribulation to describe the abomination of desolation. This abomination is properly understood in light of the revelation of Daniel, 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation on the subject. Accordingly, the Antichrist will commit the sacrilegious act of taking his seat in the rebuilt Jerusalem temple at the midpoint of the Tribulation period. At the sight of this abomination, those Jews in Jerusalem and Judea are to flee for their lives. The destination or direction will be the mountains (εἰς in Mark and Luke) and the route will be over or on the mountains (ἐπὶ in Matt). The flight to Pella does not meet these desiderata. Since all in Judea are commanded to flee, unbelieving Jews may also be involved. For them to pray that their flight would not be on the Sabbath may have meant that they would meet strong opposition by other orthodox Jews. Regardless, the description does not demand or even favor the presence of church saints.

The words "great tribulation" suggest the second

half of the seventieth week of Daniel. Verse 21 describes the uniqueness of that period of history. Daniel 12:1 forms the eschatological background to the verse, establishing the futurity of that period. The severity of the description matches the catastrophic nature of the future Tribulation revealed in the Apocalypse. Descriptions of the fall of Jerusalem cannot do justice to the language of the verse. Linked with this understanding is 1) the use of the phrase "those days," associated in the OT with the end-time, and 2) the universal outlook of "all flesh" (v. 22). All of these facts lead to an eschatological perspective.

God will cut short those days, not by reducing the length of the seventieth week itself. This would nullify God's prophetic promises. Instead, the Second Coming will arrive at just the right time so that the extermination of all mankind would be prevented and the elect preserved both spiritually and physically. The elect will comprise a remnant within the Jewish nation which will turn to their Messiah. There is no conclusive evidence to demand that the elect will comprise church saints. The word ἐκλεκτός in this context could suggest a Jewish element of the Tribulation.

The period of the Great Tribulation will also be characterized by false prophets who will attempt to persuade all men, especially the Jewish elect, to go out to false Messiahs in desert spots or secret rooms. But Jesus warns

not to believe them, for His return will be everywhere visible. Not only will it be as visible as lightning shooting across the sky, it will be as unmistakable as carrion is to a vulture. The expression about the vultures may go so far as to imply His return would be to the entire land of Palestine where the final conflict of Armageddon would take place.

The entire period of the Great Tribulation is begun by the abomination of desolation. Since a flight is commanded when the abomination is seen, it makes good sense to understand the abomination of verse 15 as a sign. Therefore, it would appear that verse 15 answers the question of the disciples with regard to the sign of the consummation of the age (v. 3).

CHAPTER VI

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN (24:29-35)

The discussion of verses 29-31 will address three primary concerns. First, can the historical approach adequately handle the text of verses 29-31? This passage is crucial to the historical perspective. Second, among those who view verses 29-31 as eschatological, what are the best exegetical alternatives? Third, can a posttribulational scheme satisfy the details of the unit?

There will also be three central questions concerning the fig tree parable (vv. 32-35). First, does the parable contain symbolic meaning? Second, what is the meaning of the two references to "all these things" (vv. 33,34)? And third, to what does the phrase "this generation" refer (v. 34)?

The Parousia of Verses 29-31

Somewhat surprisingly, these verses are considered by some to be the "central problem of the entire discourse."¹ This, of course, is only true for those who take the preceding material, especially verses 15-28, to have

¹Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 183.

relevance exclusively to a past destruction of Jerusalem. The problem centers around the phrase, "immediately (εὐθέως) after the tribulation" (v. 29). How can the Parousia come immediately after the A.D. 70 event?

This precise enigma has forced some to reconsider the 29-31 unit. To be consistent with the supposed historical framework of verses 4-28, the 29-31 unit is interpreted in light of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.¹ France reasons that verses 15-25 do not describe the fall of Jerusalem, only its siege. Therefore, we would expect another section to complete the prophecy by outlining the city's destruction. He argues:

The impression is virtually irresistible that one is about to be introduced to the catastrophe to which verses 14-22 [of Mark 13] have been leading up. The Matthean addition of "immediately" only strengthens this impression and lays a heavy burden of proof on those who suggest that verses 24-27 [of Mark 13; Matt 24:29-31] refer to anything other than the fall of Jerusalem.²

The Historical Approach

Verse 29

For the 29-31 unit to be interpreted in light of A.D. 70, the details of these verses must be seen in a

¹Tasker, *Matthew*, p. 225. For Tasker, the only other option is that Jesus was mistaken about when the Parousia would take place; *Ibid*.

²France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, p. 232. France cites J. R. Russell holding the historical view of 29-31 as early as 1878; *Ibid*.

drastically symbolic light. For example, the cataclysmic events of verse 29 are taken to symbolize the Roman conquest and resulting turmoil. Brown summarizes this approach:

The cosmic imagery draws attention to the divine dimension of the event in which the judgment of God is enacted. . . . In view of this, Mark 13:24-30 [Matt 24:29-34] may be interpreted as a prophecy of judgment on Israel in which the Son of man will be vindicated. Such a judgment took place with the destruction of Jerusalem, the desecration of the temple and the scattering of Israel--all of which happened within the lifetime of "this generation."¹

It is believed that the OT background of the cosmic catastrophes described in verse 29 is restricted to descriptions of political disasters and destruction of cities and nations such as in Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4. Therefore, symbolic terms are taken from OT prophecies and used in Matthew to describe the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and the eclipse of the Jewish nation.²

But verse 29 may also be interpreted symbolically of political and national upheaval by those who see the unit as describing the Second Coming. Appeal to a symbolic interpretation of the cosmic events of verse 29 is no proof that verses 30-31 were fulfilled at the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. The Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4 passages are better interpreted, not as a symbolic description of past historical events, but as a literal and/or symbolic picture of

¹NIDNTT, s.v. "γεσέ," by C. Brown, 2:38.

²France, Jesus and the Old Testament, p. 234.

future events related to the day of the Lord (Isa 13:9; 34:8) which comes on the entire world (13:11; 34:1-2).

Verse 30

Following the cosmic phenomena, the sign of the Son of Man appears (v. 30). In accordance with the meaning held by the ancient church fathers, the sign is a cryptic allusion to the cross. Josephus (War VI. v. 3) records that a star in the shape of a sword appeared in the sky just before the fall of the temple. Gaston contends that this was Matthew's sign.¹ Holding to the same A.D. 70 fulfillment, Kik interprets the sign differently. In his view, the sign is the sign of the destruction of the temple and city which mark the end of the old dispensation of Judaism.² For further proof, he reasons that "in heaven" (ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) modifies "Son of Man" and not "sign" (τὸ σημεῖον). The sign is on earth; it is the Son of Man who is in heaven.

Two reasons preclude this exegesis: First, signs are frequently located in (ἐν) or derived from (ἀπό) heaven (Mark 8:11; Luke 21:11; Acts 2:19 [τέρατα]; Rev 12:1,3; 15:1).³ Second, every other time deity is described as being in heaven, the article is employed, e.g. ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν

¹Gaston, No Stone on Another, pp. 484-85.

²J. Marcellus Kik, An Eschatology of Victory (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), p. 138.

³The Acts and Revelation passages use ἐν.

ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (Matt 5:16,45; 6:1,9,26; 7:11,21; 10:32, 33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10,14,19; Mark 11:25,26; Luke 11:2).

Outside of Matthew 24:30, only one reference contains "the Son of Man" and the "in heaven" phrases (John 3:13). But it too contains the article. The only possible exceptions to this observation would be Ephesians 3:15 and Colossians 4:1, both of which have a more generic use of terms. While it is not impossible grammatically¹ for ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ to modify "Son of Man," this evidence militates against this suggestion.

There is an obvious allusion to Zechariah 12:10 in the mention of all the tribes of the earth mourning (v. 30).² It is generally agreed that for Zechariah, the mourning is done by the tribes of Israel in genuine repentance. France³ and Kik⁴ interpret the tribes of the earth (αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς) in Matthew to mean the Jewish tribes of the land of Israel. Therefore, in their opinion, the Jews mourned in unbelief at the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. Carson implies that this view is inconsistent with Zechariah since it accepts the link with the Zechariah passage where the tribes equal Israel, but rejects the link with that

¹BDF, p. 141.

²Gundry, Use of the Old Testament, pp. 52-53.

³France, Jesus and the Old Testament, p. 237.

⁴Kik, Eschatology, pp. 139-40.

passage where the mourning is done in repentance.¹ What is confusing is that Carson opts for neither link with the Zechariah passage. This kind of consistency seems no more appropriate than Kik or France. Why is rejecting both links with Zechariah more consistently exegetical than rejecting only one of the two links? Is it not possible that both links are intended by Matthew?²

Despite the use of ὁψονται ("see," v. 30), the historical school claims that the coming of the Son of Man was not a visible appearance but a coming in judgment through the agency of the Romans.³ Based on the Danielic background of the Son of Man (7:13), they argue that the Matthean reference does not have the Parousia in view. In Daniel, the Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days and not to the earth. Therefore, "Jesus is using Daniel 7:13 as a prediction of that authority which he exercised when in A.D. 70 the Jewish nation and its leaders, who had condemned him, were overthrown, and Jesus was vindicated as the recipient

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 505.

²Another link with Zech 12:10 is missing in the historical interpretation. Whereas Zech envisions God intervening on behalf of Jerusalem at the siege of the city, "this has been reversed in Matthew's understanding in light of the outcome of the war in A.D. 70." Gaston, No Stone on Another, p. 484, note 4. That Matthew indeed reverses the divine intervention mentioned in Zech is not conclusive.

³Kik, Eschatology, pp. 140-41; Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," pp. 295-96 calls the coming a spiritual coming "to comfort anxious spirits" who are preserved from the destruction of the city.

of all power from the Ancient of Days."¹ Matthew 26:64

(Mark 14:62) supposedly supports a non-literal coming of the Son of Man.² In response to this, Carson states:

Although there can be no objection to the coming-of-the-Son-of-Man language occasionally referring to something other than the Parousia (see on 10:23, 16:28), yet when that occurs the interpretive problems are invariably notoriously complex. This is because the regular way of taking this expression and related language is as a reference to the Parousia. . . . It seems very doubtful, to say the least, that the natural way to understand vv. 29-35 is as a reference to the Fall of Jerusalem [original emphasis].³

What of the Daniel 7:13 allusion to the "one like a son of man" coming to the Ancient of Days to receive the kingdom, rather than coming to the earth in judgment? Carson reasons that Christ could have received the kingdom at His resurrection/ascension, or at the same time as His Second Coming so that His return to earth to set up His "consummated kingdom" is the actual reception of it from the Father.⁴ The latter explanation seems best. But not to be overlooked in the Daniel 7 passage is the fact that the scene "depicts a theophany of God which in the Old Testament is always a coming of God from heaven to earth for the purpose of judgment and/or salvation" [original

¹France, Jesus and the Old Testament, p. 236.

²Ibid.

³Carson, "Matthew," p. 493. Carson sees Matt 10:23 as a coming of the Son of Man in judgment at A.D. 70; Ibid., pp. 252-53.

⁴Ibid., pp. 505-6.

emphasis].¹

That verse 30 does reveal the Parousia of Christ is further proven by the verbal ties between this verse and that of 25:31 where the Second Coming is above suspicion. Similar verbal links can be related to 23:39, where it is declared that Israel will not see (ἴδῃτε) Jesus until they claim Him as their Messiah. Personal visibility surrounds the 24:30 "coming."

Verse 31

The historical outlook understands verse 31 to predict the advance of Christianity. Taking ἀγγέλους as "messengers" of the gospel rather than "angels," Tasker posits that in the verse the spread of the Christian church is prophesied to follow the Roman conquest of Jerusalem.² He writes: "It is in fact only after the old order [of Judaism] ended with the destruction of the temple that world evangelism by the Christian church, now entirely separate from Judaism, could be conducted in earnest."³ Such an exposition of verse 31 contradicts all the evidence for the spread of the gospel before A.D. 70 recorded in the inspired

¹Beasley-Murray, "Parousia of Mark," p. 576. Note that in Dan 7:21-22 the Ancient of Days comes to earth to rescue the saints. A double theophany of the Ancient of Days and the one like a son of man may be intended; Ibid.

²Tasker, Matthew, p. 226.

³Ibid., p. 227; cf. France, Jesus and the Old Testament, p. 238.

account of Acts. Gentile missions have been prospering for a few decades. Why does the destruction of Jerusalem produce incentive for an already flourishing movement?¹

A few additional objections to the historical A.D. 70 fulfillment of this passage include: 1) the 24:36-46 unit could be restricted to an A.D. 70 fulfillment by the very same reasoning;² 2) Revelation 1:7, which has language similar to 24:30, was probably written after A.D. 70 and speaks for a yet future event;³ 3) Jewish apocalyptic and intertestamental literature speak of a final gathering of Israel at the coming of the Messiah at the end of history;⁴ 4) the association of Jesus coming with clouds always has the Parousia in view in the NT;⁵ and 5) the cosmic disturbances (v. 29) are described in Revelation 6:14-17 as yet future since the dating of Revelation is most likely to be after A.D. 70.⁶

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 493.

²Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 847.

³Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 256.

⁴Ibid., pp. 262-63.

⁵Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 192.

⁶Ibid.

Non-Historical, Exegetical Alternatives

Verse 29

As was mentioned above, the phrase "immediately after the tribulation . . ." raises difficulties for those who feel compelled to take 29-31 as referring to the Parousia but 15-28 as referring to the A.D. 70 event. Various proposals are offered. Lenski wants to retranslate εὐθέως as "suddenly" and have the word modify the verb "darkened," i.e., "after the tribulation of those days, the sun will suddenly be darkened. . . ." ¹ As a result, there would be no temporal relationship between the fall of Jerusalem and the Second Coming. But others, who maintain the same structure of the fall of Jerusalem in 15-28 followed by the Parousia in 29-31, do not find this oversimplification convincing ² or lexically supportable. ³ Most appeal to prophetic foreshortening so that in the passage Jesus Himself jumps over the present age to the future time of tribulation. ⁴ This is, of course, a valid possibility if the text merely read, "After the tribulation of those days. . . ." But the word εὐθέως is hard to harmonize with

¹Lenski, Matthew, p. 947.

²Summers, "Matthew 24," p. 508.

³Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 245-46.

⁴Summers, pp. 508-9; Broadus, Matthew, p. 490; Robertson, Matthew, p. 193.

prophetic foreshortening. Fuller hopes to alleviate the tension by paraphrasing εὐθέως as "next." For him, Jesus had in view only two significant eschatological events: A.D. 70 and the Parousia. So the Parousia is the next major event in "holy history."¹ For further support, appeal is made to Luke 21:20-24 where the "times of the Gentiles" is mentioned. Here Luke is said to interpret Matthew's "immediately" by describing an extended period of Gentile dominion over Jerusalem.²

Despite the merits of these attempts to see a gap between verse 28 and verse 29, the difficulties outweigh them. Mark 13:24 specifically unites the Parousia with the Tribulation of the preceding material when it says, "But in those days, after the tribulation" (Ἀλλὰ ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν ἐκείνην). Therefore, the Parousia is within the same days (cf. "those days," Mark 13:17,19; Matt 24:19,22) as that of the great tribulation of Mark 13:14-23 (Matt 24:15-28). Likewise, the use of the term "times of the Gentiles" does not confirm the existence of a gap between verse 28 and verse 29. According to Zechariah 12:2, 14:2-3, and Revelation 11:2, the "times of the

¹Fuller, "Apocalyptic Time-Table," pp. 158-62.

²Ibid., p. 162. (Fuller also feels the divine measurement of time described in 2 Pet 3:10 lends more support to his case; Ibid., p. 162, note 5); cf. also Wilson, "Last Things," pp. 73-74.

Gentiles" could be a future period.¹ The phrase recalls Daniel 8:13,14 where it cannot be proven that an extended period of time is in view. There the time involved is limited to 2300 evenings and mornings.²

A still differing alternative is to view the εὐθεως normally but to interpret the θλίψις as the tribulation extending throughout the interadvent age. Therefore, the Parousia and accompanying catastrophes immediately follow the extended trials of the interadvent period.³ For Carson, this means that θλίψις refers back to verses 9 and 22, but not back to the great tribulation of verses 15-21 which he believes was fulfilled in A.D. 70.⁴ But this does not seem to be the connection of verse 29 with the preceding material since it contradicts the eschatological force of verses 15-28. If difficult times are to come in the last days (2 Tim 3:1) and "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse" (2 Tim 3:13), to place the "great tribulation" at the beginning of the interadvent era (A.D. 70) as he apparently does, followed by a lesser interadvent tribulation, seems somewhat peculiar. Probably the more sound approach

¹Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 213; Masters, "Eschatology of Jesus," pp. 54-56.

²Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 72.

³Alford, Matthew, p. 242; Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 113.

⁴Carson, "Matthew," pp. 504-5.

is to take the cosmic phenomena as immediately following the future Tribulation period.

Are the catastrophes of verse 29 to be taken literally or symbolically? Robertson thinks literalism is inappropriate for apocalyptic eschatology.¹ But it is not likely that the cosmic description is simply poetic imagery for earthly upheaval such as earthquakes or wars since Matthew has employed literal language for that in verses 6-7.² A symbolic understanding which would interpret verse 29 to mean earthly catastrophes would make Luke 21:25 meaningless since it adds to the heavenly phenomena, "and upon the earth [καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς] dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves."³ The text also says the powers of the heaven are shaken, not the powers of the earth. Therefore, if symbolic language is employed, the intentions cannot be anything less than a cataclysmic change in the universe.⁴ Literal cosmic phenomena correspond well to the climactic nature of Christ's

¹Robertson, Matthew, p. 193; Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 863. Rand, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 195-97 cites some who go as far as identifying the darkness of v. 29 as the Dark Ages and the sign of the Son of Man in v. 30 as the Reformation. Alford, Four Gospels, p. 243, takes the sun to symbolize the Lord, the moon to refer to human knowledge, and the stars to equal the leaders of the church.

²Cf. Hooker, "Mark 13," p. 92.

³Broadus, Matthew, p. 490.

⁴Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 251.

Second Advent.¹

Verse 30

The sign of the Son of Man has been a perplexing problem of verse 30. A summary of the interpretations include: 1) the sign is perhaps a star like that which appeared at Christ's birth;² 2) the sign is the Son of Man Himself and the genitive is appositional;³ 3) in accord with the vision of Constantine and ancient church tradition, the sign is the cross;⁴ 4) the sign is the ensign or standard of the Messiah according to the OT eschatological backdrop to the concepts in 24:30-31;⁵ 5) the sign is the Shekinah glory with which the Son of Man comes;⁶ 6) no one knows what the sign will be but it will be certain at the time of

¹Cf. Carson, "Matthew," p. 505.

²MacDonald, Matthew, pp. 272-73.

³Allen, Matthew, pp. 258-59; Wilson, "Last Things," p. 74; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 181; Robertson, Matthew, p. 193; Summers, "Matthew 24," p. 509.

⁴A. J. B. Higgins, "The Sign of the Son of Man [Matt. xxiv. 30]," NTS 9 (1963):380-82; Alford, Four Gospels, p. 243.

⁵Thomas Francis Glasson, "The Ensign of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:30)," JTS 15 (1964):299; McNeile, Matthew, p. 352; Carson, "Matthew," p. 505; Hill, Matthew, pp. 322-23.

⁶Beasley-Murray, Mark 13, p. 93; Rand, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 252-53; cf. Meyer, Matthew, p. 423; Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 324.

its occurrence.¹

A brief evaluation will be given in an attempt to discover the most reasonable interpretation. Matthew's wording attempts to distinguish the sign from the Son of Man Himself with the καὶ τότε . . . καὶ τότε . . . καὶ construction. Such a distinction will allow the question of the disciples for the sign of His coming to receive an appropriate answer.² To take σημεῖον to mean "ensign" in verse 30 denies any connection with 24:3 and would be the only NT passage to be so translated. The thought of the sign being the cross seems anachronistic.³ The thought of the sign being a star seems to contradict the stellar chaos of verse 29. But what does commend itself is a sign that would be oriented to the Jewish outlook of the passage.⁴ The use of φαίω for Jesus' illustration of the lightning (v. 27) and for the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man (v. 30) may give the hint that the Shekinah glory of God will appear for the Jews to recognize as the sign of His Parousia. If Jesus is the Shekinah glory of God that departs from the temple in 24:1 (cf. 23:38), it is reasonable to assume His return in

¹Chafer, Systematic Theology, 5:125; J. C. Fenton, The Gospel of St. Matthew, in Pelican Gospel Commentaries (Baltimore: Penguin, 1964), p. 389.

²Burnett, Testament of Jesus-Sophia, p. 350.

³Carson, "Matthew," p. 505.

⁴Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 257.

glory and power is as the Shekinah of God.

Whereas the sign of the end of the age, i.e., the abomination of desolation (v. 15), presages persecution and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, the sign of the Son of Man's Parousia anticipates a Messianic temple (cf. Dan 9:24; Ezek 40-48),¹ and all the more so if the sign is the Shekinah glory of God. The existence of a millennial temple presupposes the complete destruction of the Tribulation temple. It may be that the prophecy of the destruction of the temple in 24:2 is fulfilled at this time.

At the sight of the sign of the Son of Man, the tribes of the earth will mourn. The allusion to Zechariah 12:10-12 would suggest the mourning is done in genuine repentance by Israel. Gundry mentions the common objection and answers it:

It is usually thought that Jesus broadens the reference in Zech 12:10 by including the tribes of the whole earth as well as of Israel. But in view of Mt 23:37-39 . . . and the special interest displayed in the discourse toward events in Palestine (the abomination of desolation, the flight from Judea), we may better regard Jesus' reference as identical with Zech's, viz. the repentance of the tribes of Israel throughout the land of Palestine, as they see their Messiah returning [emphasis added].²

Since the mourning in Zechariah is one of repentance, it is

¹Ford, *Abomination of Desolation*, p. 81. Ford believes, however, the NT reinterprets the Messianic temple to be God's dwelling in the church; Ibid.

²Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, p. 234.

surprising that so many expositors¹ see Matthew's use of Zechariah to be one of mourning in disbelief. Contrary to Gundry (see emphasis above), however, the mourning is before the appearance of the Son of Man and fulfills 23:39, i.e., the Jews must acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah before they can see Him again.

The use of φυλή ("tribe") may be validly limited to the Jews, though this is opposed by many. The general consensus is that the term has reference to both Jews and Gentiles.² The NT, however, contains an expanded phraseology when φυλή is to include all men (Rev 5:9, 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). Other references contain specific terminology with φυλή, marking it out as a term for Israel (Rev 5:5; 7:4-8; 21:12). Only Matthew 24:30 and Revelation 1:7 are in question. Revelation 1:7 states that "every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him [the Jews]; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him." There is no need to see here a broader reference to φυλαί. In the same way, there is nothing to force the interpreter to reject the tribes of Israel to be the intended meaning of φυλαί in Matthew 24:30. Matthew knows how to express the thought of all nations when he wishes to do so (24:14; 25:32).

¹Cf. Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 865; Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 52, 186-87; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 258; Carson, "Matthew," p. 505 et al.

²Broadus, Matthew, p. 490; Carson, "Matthew," p. 505; Alford, Four Gospels, p. 243 et al.

The word γῆ ("earth, land"), on the other hand, may suggest the land of Palestine as the word does in the LXX,¹ or it may refer to the whole earth.² While the Parousia is certainly universal and worldwide in scope, it is not impossible to make γῆ refer to Palestine. This is probably the best explanation of the term (cf. γῆ for the land of Palestine in the parallel Discourse, Luke 21:23; cf. also Matt 27:45; Luke 4:25). The comments of France, who maintains the historical view, are nevertheless appropriate: "Thus the Matthean wording not only allows but suggests a national mourning, and since this is the clear meaning of both the MT and the LXX of Zechariah 12:10ff, it is hard to see why an international reference has ever been seen in Matthew."³ While verse 31 moves to an international scope, verse 30 does not demand this.

Verse 31

The gathering of the elect in verse 31 is clearly a universal event. The four winds represent the four points of the compass⁴ and denote by a merism the totality of the earth's surface. The "elect" were hardly gathered in A.D.

¹Gundry, Use of the Old Testament, p. 234, note 5.

²BAGD, p. 157.

³France, Jesus and the Old Testament, p. 237.

⁴Broadus, Matthew, p. 490; Carson, "Matthew," p. 506.

70. But if the future Parousia is in view, what gathering is mentioned? The ἐπισυνάγω recalls the same verb in 23:37 where a regathering of Israel formed the background to the verse. The OT predicted the restoration of Israel by a return to God, followed by their reestablishment in the land.¹ France agrees that verse 30 is a "compilation of Old Testament phrases concerned with the dispersion and regathering of the people of Israel."² Like O'Flynn, France wants to see these OT predictions fulfilled in the gathering of the new Israel (the church) shortly following the A.D. 70 war. But he admits that a future regathering of literal Israel could be intended when Matthew is joined with the OT background.³ The OT passages should not be overlooked. They speak of regathering Israel in belief from "the ends of the earth" (Deut 30:4; Isa 43:5,6), or from the "remotest parts of the earth" (Jer 31:7-9), or from "all countries" (Jer 16:14,15; 23:4).⁴ As was observed in 24:22,24, the "elect" called to mind the OT doctrine of the Jewish remnant

¹Cf. O'Flynn, "Eschatological Discourse," p. 280. O'Flynn, however, sees these prophecies fulfilled in the church beginning in A.D. 70; Ibid.

²France, Jesus and the Old Testament, p. 238.

³Ibid., pp. 238-39.

⁴Jewish apocryphal and intertestamental literature attest to the same truth given in the OT, i.e., that Israel is to be regathered in a decisive and final act of God (2 Macc 2:7; Tobit 14:5-7; Enoch 60:1ff.; Testament of Asher 7:5-7; Psalms of Solomon 17:28); cf. Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 262-63.

(cf. Isa 1:9) which also appears in Pauline theology (Rom 11:27).¹ All factors considered, verse 31 depicts the gathering of the believing Jews to their homeland in preparation for the millennial kingdom.

Chiasmus in 29-31

It may be noted very briefly that once again a chiasm may surface in the Discourse. Avila notes the pattern:

- A. Cosmic signs (v. 29)
- B. Sign of the Son of Man (v. 30)
- A.¹ Cosmic gathering of the elect

This simple chiasm is marked by the inclusio at verses 29 and 31 where cosmic happenings are stressed.² But a more sophisticated chiasm may be evident:

- A. Cosmic catastrophies (v. 29)
- B. Appearance of the sign of the Son of Man (v. 30a)
- C. Mourning of the tribes (v. 30b)
- B.¹ Appearance of the Son of Man (v. 30c)
- A.¹ Cosmic gathering of the elect (v. 31)

This structure may be criticized because the mourning of the tribes forms the center of the chiasmus. Perhaps this criticism is valid. On the other hand, the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man and the appearance of the Son of Man Himself surround the reference to the mourning of the tribes. These two appearances both relate to Christ.

¹Cf. O'Flynn, "Eschatological Discourse," p. 279.

²Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," pp. 75ff.

Therefore, He may be seen as the central figure regardless of the center of the chiasm.

Pretribulational and Posttribulational Concerns

Posttribulationists hold that 24:30,31 presents the rapture of the church following the Tribulation. The reasons for this are usually given as: 1) a pretribulational rapture is omitted from the Discourse; 2) the 24:30, 31 passage contains similar terminology to Paul's rapture discussions in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, making the Matthean passage concerned with a posttribulational rapture; and 3) Matthew 24:40,41 speak of an instantaneous gathering harmonious with 24:30,31 and other descriptions of the rapture.¹

Pretribulationists reject this reasoning on several grounds. First, there is no mention of resurrection or translation so essential to the rapture doctrine elsewhere.² This, of course, is an argument from silence. Gundry is perhaps right when he insists that not every detail of an event must be listed each time a description of that event is given. In fact, he notes that several other rapture passages do not mention resurrection (John 14:1-3; 2 Thess

¹Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, pp. 134-39.

²Walvoord, Blessed Hope, p. 89; Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," p. 52.

2:1).¹

Second, pretribulationists argue that if the rapture and resurrection take place in verse 31 and the wicked are judged at the Parousia according to 25:31ff., as posttribulationists say, there will be no one left to enter the millennium.² Gundry attempts to solve the problem by proposing that the 144,000 of Revelation 7 constitute a Jewish remnant who will turn to faith in the Messiah after the rapture has taken place as they see their Messiah descending to earth. These form the nucleus of the saints who will enter the millennium in their natural bodies.³ But this fails to meet the demands of the passage because first, if the rapture and resurrection in the posttribulational system are identified with the sounding of the trumpet and the gathering of the elect in verse 31, then even the Jewish remnant of verse 30 will be resurrected at this time. This is substantiated by the Matthean chronology: after the cosmic signs, then (καὶ τότε) the sign of the Son of Man appears, followed by (καὶ τότε) the mourning of the tribes, then (καὶ) the Parousia, and finally (καὶ) the sending out of the angels to gather the elect. Gundry seems to imply that verse 31 is where the rapture and resurrection are to

¹Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 136.

²Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 73.

³Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 82.

be located, while at the same time he places the rapture before the Parousia descent and before the conversion of the Jewish remnant of verse 30.¹ So somehow the rapture is described in verse 31 but in actuality takes place between verses 29 and 30; and the resurrection, which is not specifically mentioned, takes place chronologically at verse 31. In this way he is able to populate the millennium with unglorified saints.

Second, the details of the passage are not met because in verse 30 the repentant mourning of the Jewish remnant precedes the Parousia (unless one wishes to make the identification of the sign of the Son of Man with Jesus Himself²). This is the scriptural testimony elsewhere (Matt 23:39; Hos 5:15-6:3).³ Gundry and other posttribulationists must place the repentance of the Jewish remnant right at the appearance of Christ and not before, so that the rapture is not significantly separated from the actual appearance of Christ. But if as Matthew states, the Jewish remnant expresses faith before Christ appears, and the rapture takes place before the Jewish remnant repents, there

¹Ibid., p. 136 with p. 82.

²See pp. 194-96.

³Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 73; Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, p. 214. Moo counters this by denying the eschatological nature of the Hos passage; Ibid., p. 164. But Matthew 23:39 would need to be de-eschatologized also.

is some passing of time between the rapture and the Parousia. But if there is any time interval at all between the rapture and Christ's appearance at the Parousia, the door is open to a pretribulational scheme. The only difference between pre- and post-tribulationism is the length of the interval.¹

Posttribulationists must view the gathering of the elect (v. 31) as including all saints if a posttribulational rapture is maintained in verses 29-31. But the gathering of the elect accords much more with the gathering of the Jews at the end of the Tribulation as predicted in the OT (Deut 30:1-4; Isa 27:12,13) than with any Pauline rapture terminology.² Gundry, nevertheless, feels the similarities with the rapture in 1 Thessalonians cannot be easily dismissed.³ But neither can the differences. Sproule lists

¹Cf. Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 81.

²Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," pp. 52-53.

³Gundry illustrates his point: "We know that in the gospels, certain narratives--say, of the feeding of the five thousand--concern the same incident because a number of the main details are identical and because we can harmonize the varying details. So it is with the accounts of our Lord's return"; Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 161. Gundry's own illustration beautifully demonstrates the pretribulational argument he wishes to counter. While the feeding of the multitude in Matt 14:15-21 and that in Matt 15:32-38 are quite similar, the striking differences have outweighed the similarities so much that scholars interpret them as two different events: the feeding of the 5000 and the feeding of the 4000. (For a good discussion of the issue, see Carson, "Matthew," p. 358; cf. also Matt 16:9-10.) So it is with the accounts of the rapture and the Second Coming.

seven factors in Matthew 24:29-31 not found in any rapture passage: the darkening of the sun; the darkening of the moon; the darkening of the stars; the stars falling from heaven; the heavenly powers being shaken; all the tribes of the earth mourning; the universal, visible coming of Christ; and the commission of angels to gather the elect.¹ Feinberg also notes the differences:

Take the supposed similarities between 1 Thessalonians 4 and the Olivet Discourse. There are angels, clouds, trumpets, and the gathering of believers in both texts. Notice what happens when you examine both passages carefully. In Matthew the Son of Man comes on the clouds, while in 1 Thessalonians 4 the ascending believers are in them. In Matthew the angels gather the elect; in 1 Thessalonians the Lord Himself (note the emphasis) gathers the believers. Thessalonians only speaks of the voice of the archangel. In the Olivet Discourse nothing is said about a resurrection, while in the latter text it is the central point. In the two passages the differences in what will take place prior to the appearance of Christ is striking. Moreover, the order of ascent is absent from Matthew in spite of the fact that it is the central point of the epistle. . . . While it may be true that the trumpet is an established symbol for the ushering in of the time of Israel's salvation and judgment, it surely has many other functions in eschatological literature. This can easily be seen from the Book of Revelation.²

It can be concluded from the foregoing arguments that the difficulties for viewing a posttribulational rapture at 24:29-31 seem greater than for the pretribulational understanding of these verses.

¹Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," p. 53.

²Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, pp. 225-26.

The Fig Tree Parable (vv. 32-35)

Verse 32 is a transition point. The prophecy begun in verse 4 has climaxed at the 29-31 pericope with the description of the Parousia. In verses 32-35, Jesus gives a lesson as to how the disciples might know when He is about to come in His glory. This broad overview of the pericope is simple; the details of the section are difficult. One scholar claims, "The interpretation of this section is the most crucial and the most disputed of the entire discourse."¹ Another confirms this when he writes, "Commentators who are quite similar in their points of view in prophecy have differed considerably in their exposition of this last portion of Matthew 24 [i.e., vv. 32-44]."²

The major exegetical problems of the section are:

- 1) what is the meaning of "all these things" (v. 33)?;
- 2) who or what is then near at the door (v. 33)?;
- 3) what is the meaning of "this generation" (v. 34)?;
- and 4) what is the meaning of the second use of "all these things" (v. 34)?

With four major variables, the combinations yield a great number of interpretations. In a simplified fashion, a small sampling of the various views include: 1) "when you see the abomination of desolation (etc.), the destruction of Jerusalem is near. This generation of

¹Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 56.

²Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 20.

contemporaries will not die before A.D. 70";¹ 2) "when you see the events of the interadvent age, the Parousia is near. This generation of contemporaries will not die before all the interadvent signs begin";² 3) "when you see the destruction of Jerusalem, the Parousia is near. This generation of contemporaries will not die until the destruction of Jerusalem takes place";³ 4) "when you see the destruction of Jerusalem, the Parousia is near. This generation of contemporaries will not die until they witness the fulfillment of all the predicted signs of the Parousia, making it imminent for all who live after A.D. 70";⁴ 5) "when you see the premonitory signs and the Parousia, the end is near. Wicked and godless people will continue up to the very end";⁵ 6) "when you see the premonitory signs and the Parousia, the end is near. The Jewish nation will not be extinguished before the end comes";⁶ 7) "when you see the premonitory signs to the Parousia, the Parousia is near. The end-time generation will not die before the end comes."⁷

¹Kik, Eschatology, pp. 151-57.

²Carson, "Matthew," pp. 506-7.

³Fuller, "Apocalyptic Time-Table," p. 163.

⁴George E. Ladd, Jesus and the Kingdom (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 317.

⁵Ridderbos, Coming of the Kingdom, pp. 498-502.

⁶Alford, Four Gospels, pp. 244-45.

⁷Hill, Matthew, p. 323.

The Meaning and Application of the
Fig Tree (vv. 32-33)

What does the fig tree represent?

A number of popular writers¹ and older dispensational writers² understand the fig tree in the parable of the Lord to refer to the rebirth and reestablishment of Israel as a nation. Represented in the fig tree, the rebirth of Israel is even considered to be the answer to the disciples' question concerning the sign of His coming and the end of the age.³ Motyer also entertains the possibility that the fig tree represents Israel, but that it depicts the rejection of the nation rather than its rebirth.⁴

In verse 33, the specific intention of the parable⁵ is declared, viz. the relation between "all these things" ταῦτα πάντα) and "He(it) is near" (ἐγγύς ἐστίν). When one sees the former, the latter is to be recognized as close at

¹Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pp. 53-54; Tim LaHaye, The Coming Peace in the Middle East (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 81.

²Rand, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 256-57, lists as holding this view, H. A. Ironside, A. C. Gaebelien, William Kelly and E. Schuyler English.

³LaHaye, Coming Peace, p. 81.

⁴NIDNTT, s.v. "σικκῆ," by J. A. Motyer, 1:725.

⁵The word παραβολή in v. 32 carries a very general meaning of "lesson" or "instructive comparison"; Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 866; Carson, "Matthew," p. 506.

hand.¹ Since the phrase, "all these things," finds its antecedent in the previous discourse material, the fig tree is unlikely a symbol of the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948. There is no prediction in verses 4-30 concerning Israel's pretribulational restoration to the land,² even though the contents of those verses presume Israel is in the land and has a temple (cf. v. 15ff.). But this evidence may not exclude symbolism in the use of the fig tree.

Walvoord feels strongly that no scriptural text warrants the use of the fig tree as representing Israel.³ But W. R. Telford has set forth a strong case from both testaments and Rabbinic literature to show the validity of the fig tree symbolizing Israel. From the OT, he concludes that the fig tree is 1) a symbol of peace, prosperity and security; 2) appears "as imagery predominantly in the prophetic books and . . . very often in passages with an eschatological import."⁴ He further concludes:

¹While γινώσκετε appears in v. 32 and v. 33, the first appearance is to be regarded as an indicative since the lesson of the parable is based on "the common observation" that the budding of the fig tree in spring leads to summer fruitfulness; Ibid. The second would be imperative, calling on the disciples to learn (μαθήτε, v. 32) the lesson Jesus is teaching.

²Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 22.

³Ibid.

⁴William R. Telford, The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree, JSNT Supplement 1 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), p. 134.

Common to these [eschatological] passages are the following two motifs. On the one hand, the blossoming of the fig-tree and its giving of its fruit is a descriptive element in passages which depict Yahweh's visiting his people with blessing. This has already been apparent in such passages as Dt. 8.7-8, 1 Kgs. 4.24-25 and 1 Mc. 14.12, but the blessing motif is even more strongly accentuated in Hag. 2.19 and the fig-tree is linked specifically with the blessings of the Messianic Age in Mi. 4.4 and Zech. 3.10.

On the other hand, the withering of the fig-tree, the destruction or the withholding of its fruit is a descriptive element in passages where Yahweh's judgment upon his people or their enemies is stressed [original emphasis].¹

When the fig tree is mentioned symbolically in eschatological passages, "other trees are also mentioned without detracting from this symbolism," e.g. the vine.² The tree in general "is employed regularly as an image for the spiritual dimension of man and for the religious life of Israel in particular" [original emphasis].³ The

¹Ibid., pp. 134-35. It is at this point that Telford notes the word play in Amos 8:2 between יָרֵךְ, "summer," and יָרֵךְ, "end"; Ibid., p. 135. Gundry denies that this word play effects the parable in Matt since Matt 24:33 expects a personal subject, "He is near," not "It [the end] is near." He bases his reason on the phrase, "at the door," which implies the personal subject; Gundry, Matthew, p. 490. But if the End and the Parousia are contemporaneous, the word play might stand, even with the personal subject in verse 33. The word יָרֵךְ means "summer fruit," which were dried figs; Telford, Withered Tree, p. 135. Besides this, there appears to be a word play in the Greek between θέρος, "summer," and θύρα, "door."

²Ibid., p. 137.

³Ibid. For the general use, see Ps 1:3; 92:12-14; Jer 17:7-8. For the particular use, see Num 24:5-7 (cedar); Ps 80:8-16 (vine); Isa 1:30 (oak); Jer 11:16-17 (olive), etc. "The basic idea is of Israel as God's planting established in the Promised Land by his act of redemption, and watered and nourished (as long as she is faithful) by his grace"; Ibid., p. 138.

statement in Luke 21:29, which speaks of the fig tree "and all the trees" may not necessarily, then, exclude an eschatological symbolism in Matthew. Matthew also has the article, τῆς συκῆς (v. 32). This may be an anaphoric use of the article, introducing a well-known or assumed-to-be-known¹ symbol.

Of further interest is the connection of the fig tree symbolism to the temple: an unfruitful fig tree was associated with the degradation, the fruitful fig tree was linked with the well-being of the temple.² The blossoming of the fig tree in Matthew may symbolize the upcoming blessings of the Messianic Age associated with the Parousia. This would also mean the reestablishment of Jerusalem and a millennial sanctuary as the central focus of worship (Isa 2:1-4; Zech 14:10,21; Ezek 40-47; etc.). The "summer," then, will be a time of fruitfulness in Israel, and the blossoming of the fig tree in spring will be a harbinger of the coming Messianic age.

What are "all these things"
(ταῦτα πάντα) (v. 33)?

Having ascertained the import of the 4-31 unit to be eschatological, references to the A.D. 70 event can be excluded from the phrase, "all these things." Important

¹BDF, pp. 131-32.

²Telford, Withered Tree, p. 141, passim.

factors help influence the meaning of the phrase. First, in the Discourse (vv. 4-31), the phrase was previously used in verse 8 to describe the events which initiate and carry through the Tribulation period. Second, Luke 21:31 states, "when you see these things happening" (γινόμενα), which seems to stress the thought that the signs are in progress when seen and not completed.¹ Verse 32 emphasizes this ongoing activity with the present tense, ἐκφύη ("are putting forth leaves") and ἤδη with γένηται ("has already become" tender).² The processes of springtime are underway and progressing. Perhaps this is intended to recall the "beginning (ἀρχή) of woes" (v. 8). Third, the phrase ἐγγύς ἐστιν, given the eschatological backdrop, will take on the meaning 1) "He is near," referring to the coming of the Son of Man; 2) "It is near," referring to the end of the age; or 3) "It is near," referring to the kingdom of God as in Luke 21:31. But there is no need to make a refined distinction. In premillennial theology, the kingdom is essentially coterminous with the Parousia (cf. 25:31), and in Matthew 24:3 the end and the Parousia are temporally commensurate. A personal subject is the best choice in light of the

¹Contra Gundry, Matthew, p. 490, who holds that the completion of the fulfillment of the precursive signs needs to be seen before one could conclude that the coming of the Son of Man is near.

²Lenski, Matthew, p. 928, sees "put forth" as durative and "has become" as punctiliar.

additional phrase, "at the door" (ἐπὶ θύραις; cf. Jas 5:9; Rev 3:20).¹

Fourth, it is illogical to include verses 29-31, i.e., the cosmic catastrophes, the Parousia, and the gathering of the elect, as part of "all these things." It is pointless to say, "when you see the Parousia, know that He is near."² This would destroy the distinction intended between the corresponding phrases.³ These evidences suggest that "all these things" specify the signs which appear during the Tribulation period. The Tribulation signs, taken together, mean that the Son of Man is soon to come in judgment for the wicked and in deliverance for the elect. When these signs begin, one can know that His Second Advent is close at hand.⁴ Luke 21:28 confirms this understanding of the fig tree parable: "But when these things begin to take place [ἀρχομένων δὲ τούτων γίνεσθαι] . . . your redemption is drawing near."

"This Generation" and Verses 34-35

Those of the historical school find 24:34 to be their key text for determining the chronology of 24:1-35 as

¹McNeile, *Matthew*, p. 354; Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 490.

²Cf. Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 59; Carson, "Matthew," p. 507.

³Ibid.

⁴There is no need with Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 23, to restrict the signs indicated by the phrase "all

fulfilled in A.D. 70. In their view, Jesus declared that the generation living at the time of Jesus would witness all of the events revealed in the Discourse up to verse 35.¹ This, of course, means that the clear and unavoidable prophecy of the Lord's future return is spiritualized to mean an invisible coming at the fall of Jerusalem. Hermeneutically, it seems more sound to allow the clearer text to stand (i.e., vv. 29-31), and look for other exegetical alternatives to verse 34. While there is a consensus (though not unanimous) that 29-31 concerns the future Parousia, verse 34 offers little unanimity.

To a large degree, the meaning of the verse hinges on the lexical meaning of γεγενῆς. In the NT, the word is used forty-three times, eighteen times with the demonstrative, with six of these in Matthew (11:16; 12:41,42,45; 23:36; 24:34). The natural if not universal meaning of the word in the NT is that of present, living contemporaries.² Some wish to find in γεγενῆς the definition of "race, tribe, or nation."³ Support for this is found in the LXX use of

these things" to the signs of the Great Tribulation.

¹Kik, Eschatology, pp. 59-66.

²BAGD, p. 154; TDNT, s.v. "γεγενῆς," by Friedrich Büschel, 1:663; Ford, Abomination of Desolation, pp. 68, 93, note 43.

³Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 281; Alford, Four Gospels, p. 244.

the word.¹ But in the NT, passages that are adduced in proof of γεῖν meaning "race" (e.g. Matt 17:17; Luke 16:8; 17:25; Acts 2:40; Phil 2:15) can naturally and more easily be read as "contemporaries."² Jesus could have used the word γένος if He wanted to clearly designate "nation, race."³ It also is contextually weak to view verse 34 as a promise that the Jewish race will not be extinguished. Jesus had just finished saying that the Jews would mourn in repentance and be gathered from everywhere at His coming (vv. 30,31). There does not seem to be a serious need to repeat the concept that Israel will survive up to His coming.

The phrase in 24:34 is ἡ γεῖν αὐτῆς. This phrase has been viewed by some as a technical term for a certain kind of people, viz., a faithless, unbelieving people.⁴ Luke 16:8 may have this meaning,⁵ but the phrase ἡ γεῖν αὐτῆς does not appear there. It is true that γεῖν frequently has pejorative terms modifying it (Matt 12:45; 16:4; 17:17; Mark 8:38; Acts 2:40). But it cannot be

¹Ibid.; Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 868.

²John A. Battle, Jr., "Matthew 24:34 and the Time of the Parousia" (post-graduate seminar paper, Grace Theological Seminary, 1974), pp. 9-10.

³Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 285.

⁴Morganthaler, "γεῖν," 2:36; Lenski, Matthew, p. 952; Ridderbos, Coming of the Kingdom, p. 502.

⁵Cf. BAGD, p. 154.

concluded that γεγενῆσθαι without the modifiers takes on the same meaning as with the modifiers.¹ Nor can it be surmised that Jesus precludes the future regeneration of Israel, as Lenski suggests in his attempt to see γεγενῆσθαι as an unbelieving Jewish people.²

The temporal nature of the passage may cancel all attempts to see a non-temporal meaning like "race" or "an evil kind of people" in γεγενῆσθαι. The temporal elements include: 1) the two-fold repetition of ἐγγύς ("near"), stressing chronological nearness; and 2) the three-fold repetition of παρέρχουμαι ("passing away") which involves time.³ Thoughts of the Jewish race continuing up to the Parousia or of a type of Jew in existence in Christ's day continuing to the Parousia, miss the central idea of chronology in the passage. The word γεγενῆσθαι should be read in the sense of "generation" or "contemporaries."

It is one thing to say "contemporaries" is the natural meaning for γεγενῆσθαι; it is entirely another matter to say

¹Mare sees γεγενῆσθαι as a positive word in Matt 24:34, suggesting that "Jesus may be interpreted here as teaching that people of the family of faith will still be here on earth when 'all these things' come to pass [original emphasis]"; W. Harold Mare, "A Study of the New Testament Concept of the Parousia," in Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 343.

²Lenski, Matthew, pp. 952-53.

³Cf. Morganthaler, "γεγενῆσθαι," 2:36.

it means the contemporaries of Christ's day. Carson understands γεῦεσθαι as the contemporaries of Christ, but attempts to escape the difficulties of this understanding in a unique way. He states that

it does not follow that Jesus mistakenly thought the Parousia would occur within his hearers' lifetime . . . all that v. 34 demands is that the distress of vv. 4-28, including Jerusalem's fall, happened within the lifetime of the generation then living. This does not mean that the distress must end within that time but only that "all these things" must happen within it. Therefore v. 34 sets a terminus a quo for the Parousia: it cannot happen till the events in vv. 4-28 take place, all within a generation of A.D. 30. But there is no terminus ad quem to this distress other than the Parousia itself . . . [original emphasis].¹

It would seem, although Carson does not state it directly, that this view takes the γένηται ("happen," v. 34) as an inceptive aorist: "until all these things begin to happen." But the inceptive idea may be unwarranted. The genre is prophetic and it would be natural to think of a consummative aorist.² The exact phrase in verse 34 is ἕως ἃν πάντα ταῦτα γένηται. A very similar phrase is used in Matthew 5:18: ἕως ἃν πάντα γένηται. BAGD interprets the 5:18 reference to be a reference to what has transpired and is past.³ There is no reason to take the verb otherwise in 24:34. In fact, in Matthew 24, γίνομαι is consistently used of

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 507.

²Cf. BDF, p. 166, who speak of an "effective aorist" which emphasizes the end of an action.

³BAGD, p. 158, I3a.

consummated events (24:6,20,21,21,32). The solemn promise is that "this generation" will not pass away until all these things are past. Alford perceptively notes, "The continued use of *παρέρχομαι* in vv. 34,35, should have saved the commentators from the blunder of imagining that the then living generation was meant, seeing that the prophecy is by the next verse carried on to the end of all things."¹

One alternative is left. "This generation" refers to the generation which will see the Tribulation signs and therefore will not pass away until Christ comes. Walvoord, holding that the signs are the signs of the Great Tribulation, explains: "On the basis of other Scriptures, teaching that this period is only three and one-half years, this prophecy becomes a very plausible explanation."² There is evidence from Qumran writings (1 QpHab 2:7; 7:2) that the term "last generation" referred to the generation living in the last phase of history, i.e., the end-time generation.³ Others also equate "generation" with the generation of the end-signs.⁴ Jesus has been teaching the disciples privately.

¹Alford, Four Gospels, p. 245.

²Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 24.

³E. Earle Ellis, The Gospel of Luke, in New Century Bible Commentary, eds. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 246-47. Ellis, however, thinks the end-time generation stretches from the resurrection of Christ to the Parousia; *Ibid.*

⁴Cf. Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 209; Hare, Jewish Persecution, pp. 88-89.

He has discussed eschatological events which involved the nations living at the end of history (v. 14) and Judean residents who would live during the Great Tribulation (v. 16). He had mentioned people who made up the elect, those to be gathered at His coming (v. 31). Therefore, it does not present itself as strained exegesis to see in these groups "this generation" to which Jesus made reference.¹ The generation which sees the Tribulation signs can know that He was near in coming and that the time was now short for His return.

Conclusion

The details of verses 29-31 can hardly fit an historical fulfillment at the Jewish War. The language is too naturally that of the Parousia taught elsewhere in similar terminology by Christ Himself. But the remaining explanations of the relationship between verses 15-28 and 29-31 falter if an eschatological view of verses 15-28 is rejected. The phrase "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (v. 29) definitely links 15-28 with 29-31 temporally. If the future Great Tribulation is immediately followed by the events of 29-31, the εὐθέως is not

¹Contextually, the near demonstrative rather than the far demonstrative should not be problematic. Οὗτος is generally used to point out "someone previously mentioned= the subject which is continued in the discussion [original emphasis] . . ."; BDF, p. 151. The generation that has been previously mentioned has been the generation of the Tribulation.

problematic.

Verse 29 probably depicts a literal cosmic upheaval appropriate to the climactic nature of the Parousia. With the universe extensively darkened, the sign of the Son of Man will appear. The text does not reveal what the sign will be, but the most reasonable assumption is that it will involve the appearance of the Shekinah glory of God. Jesus will come with great glory (v. 30). The appearance of that glory may begin before His actual appearance. At the sight of this sign, the Jewish tribes throughout Palestine will mourn in genuine repentance. Then the Son Himself will appear for their salvation. He will send out His angels to gather all believing Jews, including those in Palestine, for the setting up of His millennial reign.

The efforts to harmonize verses 29-31 with posttribulational doctrine raise several problems. Posttribulationists wish to see the rapture and resurrection in verse 31. But in Matthew, the rapture (if it is equated with the gathering of the elect in v. 31) follows the Parousia (v. 30). This is especially problematic for posttribulationists who are premillennial such as Gundry. No believers are apparently left to populate the millennium. Gundry, therefore, wants the Matthean order to be as follows: rapture of the saints, then the repentance of the Jewish remnant as they see the descending Christ or the Parousia. But in Matthew, the chronological order is strictly 1) the

sign of the Son of Man; 2) the repentance of the Jewish remnant before the appearance of the Son of Man; 3) the Parousia; and 4) the gathering of the elect. This chronology stands against posttribulationism.

The fig tree illustration in verses 32-33 was shown to carry an eschatological symbolism of the coming blessings of the Messianic Age. Nevertheless, the text stresses the chronological lesson to be learned: as the budding of the fig tree signals the near approach of summer, so the judgments of the Tribulation (vv. 4-8) and the events of the Great Tribulation as well (vv. 15-28) indicate the closeness of the Parousia.

Concerning the phrase, "this generation," it was concluded that γεγενῆσθαι means "contemporaries" in the NT, and that the temporal indicators in verse 34 eliminated non-temporal meanings of the Greek term. But the demonstrative, "this generation," does not point to Jesus' own contemporaries, but to the individuals concerning which He was teaching--the end-time generation. "This end-time generation," He said, "will see both the start and finish of the Tribulation, and assuredly witness My return."

CHAPTER VII

THE COMING OF THE DAY OF THE LORD (24:36-44)

Posttribulationists¹ and many pretribulationists² believe that a pretribulational rapture is not mentioned in the Olivet Discourse at 24:36-44. This chapter is an attempt to question this interpretation and present a case for a pretribulational rapture in these verses.

The Relationship of Verse 36 to the Preceding Material

An obvious climax has been reached in the Discourse at verses 29-31. From verses 4-29, Jesus has revealed the events that lead up to His coming. In verses 30 and 31, He describes His Parousia and the regathering of Israel--events which end history as we know it and begin the new age of the millennial kingdom. The outline of present history is now

¹Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 202; George E. Ladd, The Blessed Hope (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 73; Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 209.

²John F. Walvoord, "Is a Posttribulational Rapture Revealed in Matthew 24?" GTJ 6 (1985):263-65; Idem, Blessed Hope, p. 88; Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, pp. 230-31; Rand, "Olivet Discourse," p. 126.

complete. But at verse 32, Jesus turns His attention to the timing of the Lord's return.¹ It is as near to the Tribulation signs as summer is to the spring budding of the fig tree. These signs and the Parousia will both be within a single generation. The initial impression from these verses is that once the Tribulation signs begin, the Second Coming is to be highly predictable.

Does Verse 36 Refer to the Second Coming?

It is readily agreed that if verse 36 refers to the same event as detailed in verses 32-35 (which refers to the Parousia of vv. 29-31), a serious problem arises.² The historical school solves the dilemma by making verse 36 the transition point into the eschatological teaching. The phrase, "that day," suggests the transition.³ For those of the historical-eschatological approach, one alternative is to take verses 32-35 as referring to the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem and not the Parousia of verses 29-31.⁴ This would eliminate the contradiction that in 32-35 premonitory

¹Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 324, goes too far in his observation of the break between verses 31 and 32 when he states, "Everything has now been said." Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 275-76 suggests the transition is from didactic material to paraenetic, exhortational material.

²Ibid., pp. 289-90.

³Kik, Eschatology, pp. 67-68; Tasker, Matthew, p. 227.

⁴Avila, "Fall of Jerusalem," p. 128.

signs are to be recognized to discern the time of the event described, while in verse 36 the time of the event described is unknowable.¹ The difficulty with this understanding is 1) 4-28 does not address the A.D. 70 event, and 2) verse 29 also mentions premonitory signs which will immediately precede the Parousia. It would seem that these cosmic disruptions would make Christ's advent very predictable.

Another tack for those of the historical-eschatological² or the eschatological³ view is to suggest the precise moment of His return cannot be known, only the general time of His advent. This seems most surprising from those who believe the Discourse to be eschatological, for they believe the signs mentioned in 15-28 describe the second half of Daniel's seventieth week. But if this time period comprises three and one-half years (Rev 12:14) or precisely 1260 days (Rev 11:3; 12:6), it would seem that a fairly accurate pinpointing of Christ's advent would be possible. Perhaps the exact moment would still be incalculable, but would the Parousia come as a total surprise, like the breaking in of a thief? Broadus notes about verse 36 in a rebuttal of postmillennialism, "It follows that our Lord's coming certainly cannot be at the end of a thousand years of universal

¹Ibid.

²Woolery, "Olivet Discourse," p. 61.

³Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," p. 25.

and perfect piety, for in that case all would know the exact time. . . ."¹ But if his logic is correct, would not the same be true of the Lord's coming at the end of the seventieth week?

If verse 36 has reference to the same events as the Parousia in 29-31, both pretribulationists and posttribulationists have a problem. Walvoord is correct in stating that the Second Coming cannot be imminent since it is preceded by the signs of the rise of the Antichrist, the covenant with Israel, and the forty-two month Great Tribulation, etc.² Yet, it would appear he understands the Parousia to be somewhat imminent [i.e., unexpected and incalculable] in that no one will know the exact time of the Second Coming.³ But Gundry's posttribulational scheme arrives at an almost identical conclusion. Although he strictly denies imminency,⁴ he wishes to retain the unexpectedness of the Lord's return based on verse 36.⁵ Since he holds that future Tribulational signs such as the abomination of desolation in Matthew precede Christ's coming,⁶ Gundry makes the Parousia somewhat imminent by suggesting that the seventieth week

¹Broadus, Matthew, p. 495.

²Walvoord, Blessed Hope, pp. 162-63.

³Idem, "Olivet Discourse," p. 25.

⁴Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, pp. 29-43.

⁵Ibid., p. 43.

⁶Ibid., p. 191.

itself is shortened according to the Lord's statement in Matthew 24:22. His own statement is worth citing:

That which positively proves the time of the posttribulational advent to be incalculable is Jesus' plain statement that no man, not even the angels or the Son of man, can know the day or hour of His coming--and this He said in immediate connection with His coming after the tribulation (Matt 24:36,42,43; Mark 13:32). The element of uncertainty is there, but it is slight. Jesus' emphasis on "day," "hour," and "watch of the night" shows that we shall not know exactly. But the delineation of preceding signs, including especially if not exclusively tribulational events, shows that we will know approximately. The shortening of the tribulation thus enables us to resolve general predictability and specific unpredictability without rendering the exhortations to watch from their posttribulational context and without minimizing the function of signalling events by resorting to the historical view [i.e., the A.D. 70 event exhausts Matt 24:15-28] with its vagaries [original emphasis].¹

Carson can also hold to a form of imminency in his posttribulational harmony of verse 36 with the Parousia of 29-31. He resorts to the "vagaries" which Gundry condemns when he interprets all the events of 24:4-35 to be sufficiently fulfilled to allow for Christ to come within any "fairly brief period of time, without specifying that the period must be one second or less."² Therefore, he argues that it is "ridiculous quibbling divorced from the context" if one insists that the approximate time of the Parousia can be known, just not the exact hour or day.³ That is

¹Ibid., pp. 42-43.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 490.

³Ibid., p. 508.

to say, the approximate time is also incalculable since there are no specific unfulfilled prophecies that precede the Parousia.

It is this apparent contradiction between the "signs" of the approaching end, and 24:36 and other passages portraying a sudden, unexpected return of the Lord which has led liberal theologians to discredit the authenticity of the Olivet Discourse.¹ The general liberal answer to the contradiction is to speculate that the early church, in light of the delay of Christ's return, added elements concerning a prolonged tribulation to Jesus' teaching of an imminent Parousia.²

In light of this prevailing difficulty, it is little wonder that Moo remarks:

There is no basis for any transition from the posttribulational aspect of the Parousia in Matthew 24:31-35 (or-36) to its pretribulational aspect in verses 36ff. Therefore, all interpreters, whether they believe the discourse is addressed to the church or to Israel, face the difficulty of explaining how an advent heralded by specific signs can yet be one of which it is said, "no one knows the day and hour" [original emphasis].³

By this statement, Moo makes it clear that this difficulty arises precisely because there is no basis for a transition from posttribulational to pretribulational aspects of the

¹Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 27; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 24.

²E.g. Hooker, "Mark 13," pp. 95-96.

³Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 209.

Parousia. It is this claim concerning the absence of a transition which must now be examined.

The Transitional Nature of Verse 36

The introductory περί δέ

When Jesus said that no one knows that day or hour except the Father alone,¹ Matthew records the introduction of the statement with περί δέ. Harris correctly observes that "standing absolutely at the beginning of a sentence, peri de means '(now) concerning' . . . and marks a new section of thought (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). . . ."² Pretribulationists have noticed the περί δέ construction in 1 Thessalonians 5:1. This precise construction is claimed to introduce a new and contrasting subject with the 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 presentation of the pretribulational rapture.³ It may be overstated to suggest a new and

¹For a favorable disposition toward the absence of οὐδέ ὁ υἱός in the majority text from one not inclined to agree with the majority text en bloc, see Daniel B. Wallace, "The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text: A Review Article," GTJ 4 (1983):125. Since the phrase is found in Mark 13:32, the Lord did declare ignorance of "that day and hour." If v. 36 specifies the same event as vv. 29-31, it seems strange, given the signs of vv. 4-30a which Jesus fully understood, that He would exclude Himself from knowing the day of His Second Coming.

²NIDNTT, s.v. "Appendix: Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," by M. J. Harris, 3:1203.

³Charles C. Ryrie, "The Church and the Tribulation: A Review," BSac 131 (1974):175. Ryrie adds 1 Thess 4:9,13 to the list of passages that use the prepositional construction to mark a new subject. In actuality, περί and δέ both appear in 1 Thess 4:13, but probably not in the combined

contrasting subject in 1 Thessalonians 5:1; nevertheless a new subject is introduced while at the same time continuing eschatological concerns of 4:13-18.¹ The exact perspective may be true of Matthew 24:36ff.

Waterman has observed the Matthean and Thessalonian uses of *περὶ δέ*. In the latter passage, Paul said that no one at Thessalonica needed to be informed about the times and seasons

because they knew perfectly well that the time of the Lord's coming was unknown (1 Thess. 5:1-2). A different expression, but one with the same meaning, was used by Jesus, "but concerning that day and hour . . . no one knows" (Mt. 24:36). Since Jesus introduces this remark

force of 4:9 and 5:1.

¹Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," in vol. II of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 280. Howard argues that *περὶ δέ* in 1 Thess 5:1 does not introduce a new subject but a new ethical concern; Tracy L. Howard, "The Literary Unity of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11" (interdisciplinary theology seminar paper, Grace Theological Seminary, 1985), p. 13. He does, however, seem to imply that a "shift in emphasis in light of the same subject" is evident at 1 Thess 5:1; *Ibid.*, p. 15. This seems to be only a semantic distinction from Thomas who suggests the subject of 1 Thess 5:1-11 is new but not distinct from the subject of 4:13-18; Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," p. 280. (Note the use of *περὶ δέ* in 1 Cor 7:25 where a slightly different subject is begun within the broad concerns of marriage addressed in 1 Cor 7:1-40.) Howard concludes that the Parousia of 1 Thess 4 and the day of the Lord in 1 Thess 5 are basically references to the same event. Therefore, a unity of the 4:13-5:11 passage is highly likely; Howard, "Unity of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11," pp. 16-17. But Thomas also identifies the Parousia and the day of the Lord as a single event; Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," p. 281; cf. also the present work, p. 244, note 2. The Parousia and the day of the Lord may happen at the same time without being identical. This would explain the shift of emphasis or slight change of subject introduced by the *περὶ δέ* at 5:1.

by the use of peri de, it may very well be that Paul uses these words in 1 Thessalonians 5:1 . . . because Jesus used them.¹

Paul's reasons for using περὶ δέ may be many and not just that Jesus used them. Regardless, the parallel of 1 Thessalonians 5:1 with Matthew 24:36 is instructive as will be seen below.

Not a few others have noted a major division in the text between verses 35 and 36.² Verse 36 certainly goes better with the following material than with the preceding.³ In fact, all of verses 36-44 form a well-knit unit.

Lambrecht writes of this unity:

The idea throughout these verses is one and the same. V. 37 joins v. 35 [sic, v. 36] with a γάρ [majority text, δέ] and, together with the day-of-Noah comparison, it confirms again the unknown day or hour. Vv. 38-39 elaborate the comparison and vv. 40-41 illustrate the two possible attitudes that an unexpected parousia will then (τότε) meet with. V. 42 [sic, v. 42] concludes (οὖν) and ties in with v. 36: the Lord will come on an unknown day. But v. 44 also concludes (διὰ τοῦτο) and contains the same idea. . . .⁴

He concludes that verse 36 and verse 44, speaking so similarly of the same subject, form a frame for the unit.⁵

¹G. Henry Waterman, "The Source of Paul's Teaching on the 2nd Coming of Christ in 1 and 2 Thessalonians," JETS 18 (1975):109.

²Roark, "Eschatological Discourse," p. 123; Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 325.

³Carson, "Matthew," p. 507.

⁴Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 327.

⁵Ibid.

In light of this marked transition, it is not impossible at this point to conjecture that the Lord is making a transition to the pretribulational rapture. Pretribulationists themselves have objected to this possibility since 1) the church is not addressed in the Olivet Discourse, and 2) the disciples would not be able to understand the distinction between the rapture and the Second Coming.¹ But since the disciples well represent either Israel or the church depending upon the context,² it is not impossible that they represent the church at verse 36ff. And since the disciples did not understand the new doctrine of the church, yet they were introduced to it (Matt 16:18; 18:17), could they not be introduced to the rapture doctrine and yet not be expected to fully comprehend it until later?³

"That day and (that) hour"

Other factors combine with the *περὶ δέ* to demonstrate a slight change of subject or perspective. Brown

¹Walvoord, Blessed Hope, p. 88.

²See pp. 114-15.

³Walvoord feels this reason goes against seeing the rapture here: "[The disciples] did not even comprehend the concept of the church at this time, even though it had been announced. How could they be expected to understand the distinction between a pretribulational rapture and the post-tribulational second coming. . . ."; Walvoord, Blessed Hope, p. 88. Perhaps they were not expected to understand at that moment. After all, Christ could not come again until He died, was resurrected and ascended. Then they would be expected to understand.

(who takes an historical approach to 4-35) observes one important distinction when he writes:

Such an emphatic denial of any communicable knowledge of "that day and hour" (Matt 24:36) is in striking contrast to the specific indication "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (29). This is an additional reason why the event referred to in verses 33 and 36 cannot be the same as the one referred to in v. 30. Indeed, Matthew distinguishes the two events terminologically. The period of thlipsis is characterized by the plural expression "those days" (19,22,29), whereas the singular is used for the close of the age: "that day" (36).¹

It is this shift from the plural "those days" to the singular "that day" that implies a change of subject. "The inference is clear that a new and distinct day is being described."²

What is "that day and hour"? Fuller posits that it is likely that the OT concept of the "day of the Lord" has colored Jesus' use of the 24:36 phrase. But he makes no more application of the OT concept.³ Ford also believes "that day" "pin-points the event of the great day of Yahweh so often referred to in the prophets. . . ."⁴ The word ἡμέρα ("day") may speak of an extended period of time in distinction to a specific twenty-four hour period.⁵ This

¹Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 26, note 62.

²France, Jesus and the Old Testament, p. 232; cf. O'Flynn, "Eschatological Discourse," pp. 280-81.

³Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," p. 296.

⁴Ford, Abomination of Desolation, p. 65.

⁵NIDNTT, s.v. "ἡμέρα," by C. Brown, 2:887.

NT word may also relate at times to the OT day of the Lord, which Brown says was portrayed as imminent.¹ Paul uses ἡ ἡμέρα for the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5:4. It is likely that his use may be connected with the Lord's in Matthew.²

The word ὥρα ("hour") has a similar significance. While it may be used of a moment of time (Rev 9:15), it may also suggest a span of time.³ In Revelation 3:10 where the phrase "hour of testing" occurs, ὥρα has reference to the Tribulation period.⁴

What of the combination of the two terms? Beasley-Murray believes that by themselves either word could refer to the day of the Lord, but not in this combination. Instead, a more narrow and exact time is indicated, i.e., the moment of the Parousia.⁵ But Moore contends that the demonstrative ("that day") confirms the OT background.⁶ If

¹Ibid., p. 891, where the following references are cited: Isa 10:27; 27:1; 29:19; Hag 2:23; Zech 6:10.

²Waterman, "Source of Paul's Teaching," p. 109.

³Cf. NIDNTT, s.v. "ὥρα," by H. C. Hahn, 3:847-48.

⁴A captivating use of ὥρα is found in connection with θάλασσα in John 16:21. The image is that of a woman in labor or birth pains (cf. Matt 24:8!). The illustration may be general, but since Jesus mentions His coming again in the next verse (v. 22), the passage may have eschatological overtones.

⁵Beasley-Murray, Mark 13, pp. 109-10.

⁶Moore, Parousia, pp. 99-100. Moore, however, believes that Jesus taught in 24:36 that no one knew the

the demonstrative is repeated ("that day and [that] hour"),¹ Moore's contention may be strengthened.

Therefore, verse 36 is best explained as a slight change of subject. Indeed, the thought of the passing of the heavens and the earth mentioned in the immediately preceding verse (v. 35) has also broached a slightly new subject. For this catastrophic event is elsewhere specifically delineated as part of the thief-like coming of the day of the Lord (2 Pet 3:10).

What seems evident is that the Lord is now directing His attention to the coming of the day of the Lord. The Tribulation judgments which comprise the day of the Lord have been unfolded (vv. 4-28). These judgments have answered the second and third questions of the disciples (v. 3). Their second question concerning the sign of the consummation of the age was answered in verses 4-28, with the abomination of desolation highlighted as the chief sign. Their third question concerning the sign of Christ's coming was answered in verses 29-31. What is apparently in view in the 36-44 section is not the moment of the Second Coming, but the coming of the day of the Lord (=Tribulation period). As such, the Lord would be answering the first question of

nature of the day of the Lord. This is impossible since the OT and NT everywhere describe the nature of the day of the Lord. The context makes it clear that Jesus has in mind the time that the day of the Lord will come.

¹Cf. O'Flynn, "Eschatological Discourse," p. 280.

the disciples, "when will these things be?" (πότε ταῦτα ἔσται), i.e., when will the events of the Tribulation/day of the Lord come? If this exegesis is correct, then the Olivet Discourse is presented in a chiasmus¹ (see Chapter VIII).

The Days of Noah (vv. 37-39)

If the above conclusions about verse 36 are correct, then the days-of-Noah illustration refers to the unexpected lifestyles that exist prior to the sudden onslaught of the day of the Lord judgments. But if this is not the case, then there will exist an unusually casual attitude toward life at the very time when the Tribulation judgments are being poured out in all their intensity. If these verses are to be placed chronologically at the end of the Tribulation, an indisputable contradiction arises. How could a "business-as-usual" attitude prevail during the moments, days, months, or even years immediately preceding the Second Coming?

Many commentators simply believe that the ordinary life patterns described in Matthew's illustration can coexist with the massive distresses which run their course prior to Christ's Second Coming. Normal pursuits will

¹The author was first alerted to a similar chiasmus in the Discourse through a letter dated May 10, 1984, from S. Craig Glickman, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary.

continue right up to Christ's return.¹ Gundry strictly denies the possibility of a pretribulational rapture in verses 37ff. on the basis of the same reasoning:

But are we to think that people in the tribulation will stop eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage? The emphasis in the words of Jesus does not fall upon a normal condition of life, but upon the unexpected suddenness of His advent to those who will be engaged otherwise than in watching for Him.²

But this understanding does not adequately explain the text. First, Gundry wants the nature of that day to be sudden and unexpected only for the ones who are not watchful (the unbelievers). But that day is sudden and unexpected for all since no one knows the time of its arrival (v. 36). Second, while the emphasis of the illustration does not fall on the normal conditions of life, the lifestyles depicted are those which go beyond conditions for survival. They are pursuits oblivious to the coming judgment of God. Does this picture really harmonize with the Tribulation events? Will unbelievers be pursuing normal life activities, unaware of the coming judgment or Second Advent?

What is more appealing exegetically is the striking similarity of Christ's Noahic illustration and Paul's concept of the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5. The similarities of thought are convincing evidence that the

¹Rand, "Olivet Discourse," p. 271; Alford, Four Gospels, p. 246; Carson, "Matthew," p. 509.

²Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 202.

source of Paul's teaching was the Olivet Discourse.¹ For Paul, the sudden and unexpected day of the Lord will be preceded by a time of "peace and safety" (1 Thess 5:1-3)--the precise imagery of Matthew 24:39.² During the Tribulation, the very existence of all life would be in such jeopardy (Matt 24:22) that the tranquility of life described in 24:37-39 could hardly take place before the Second Coming.³

In the Lord's illustration, the days of Noah were the days before (πρὸ, v. 38) the judgment of the flood. When the flood came, it took all but Noah's family in sudden and unexpected judgment. In Paul's discussion, the day of the Lord will overtake the unbeliever so that he will not escape (1 Thess 5:3). Therefore, the Noah illustration admirably portrays the surprise arrival of the day of the Lord.⁴

¹Waterman, "Source of Paul's Teaching," pp. 106-7.

²Ibid., p. 110. Gundry attempts to explain the "peace and safety" of 1 Thess 5:2 as the wish or expectation of men rather than the actual conditions; Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 92. This view is unlikely since "the passage contrasts peace and safety with destruction. Now if peace and safety means a wish in the midst of a time of war and danger, then any contrast with destruction that will follow disappears"; Charles C. Ryrie, What You Should Know About the Rapture (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 100.

³Hodges, "1 Thessalonians 5:1-11," p. 79, note 5.

⁴It needs to be reiterated here that the day of the Lord is best understood as beginning prior to a final conflict at the close of the tribulation or immediately after the tribulation (contra Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, pp. 77, 95). The day of the Lord in 2 Thess 2 is declared

In light of this evidence, it is curious that some¹ have rejected a typological significance of the flood in indicating the future judgment. Several OT passages imply the beginning stages in the development of the flood as a type of the end of the world in apocalyptic literature.² Isaiah 54:9 speaks of the days of Noah in comparison to another day in which God will show His "overflowing anger" (v. 8).³ In Isaiah 24:14-18, the "overwhelming flood" (vv.

to include two events: the apostasy and the revealing of the man of sin. (For a literary and grammatical analysis of 2 Thess 2:3 that confirms that these two happenings compose the early stages of the day of the Lord rather than preceding events, see Robert L. Thomas, "A Hermeneutical Ambiguity of Eschatology: The Analogy of Faith," *JETS* 23 [1980]:51-52.) Since the revelation of the man of sin coincides with the inception of the Great Tribulation, the day of the Lord must extend at least throughout this period. Thomas writes elsewhere: "By using 'day of the Lord' terminology to describe the great tribulation, Christ includes the tribulation within the day of the Lord (cf. Matt 24:21 with Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; Joel 2:2). This time of trial at the outset of the earthly day of the Lord will thus not be brief, but comparable to a woman's labor before giving birth to a child (Isa 13:8; 26:17-19; 66:7ff.). . . . Armageddon and the series of tribulation visitations prior to it are inseparable from each other (Rev 6-19). If Christ's triumphant return to earth (Rev 19:11-21) is part of the day of the Lord, as all admit, so special divine dealings preparatory to it must also be part of it. God's eschatological wrath is a unit. It is quite arbitrary to hypothesize two kinds of future wrath, one prior to the day of the Lord and another within it (cf. Gundry, pp. 46, 54)." Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," p. 281.

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 509.

²Jack P. Lewis, A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), p. 9.

³Isa 54:8 probably speaks of the Great Tribulation; McClain, Greatness of the Kingdom, p. 461.

15,18; LXX, κατακλυσμός) contributes to an OT typology concerning the flood of Genesis.¹ The reference in Daniel 9:26 to the end of the city and the sanctuary which comes as a flood (LXX, κατακλυσμός), may have a part in this theme.²

This typology is confirmed in the NT where the flood is the supreme figure of the final eschatological judgment.³ The imminent judgment of Matthew 24:37-38 is the same idea developed in 2 Peter. Peter links the flood to the future judgment (2:5 with 9).⁴ This judgment includes the day of the Lord, since Peter ties together the flood (3:6) with the future judgment (v. 7) or the day of the Lord (v. 10).

¹This Isa passage falls within the Little Apocalypse of Isa (24:1-27:13) and also relates to the Tribulation judgments (Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, pp. 126-27), the seventieth week, and the day of the Lord (Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 195).

²Even Walvoord, Daniel, p. 231, entertains the possibility that the closing remarks of Dan 9:26, with its double reference to the "end," may refer to the future destruction of Jerusalem at the end of the age.

³William Joseph Dalton, Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), pp. 112-13; cf. pp. 175, 206-7. Dalton says that Jewish rabbinical writings also view the flood as the divine judgment par excellence; *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 113. Of interest is the phrase in 2 Pet 2:9 concerning God's rescue of the righteous from trial (ἐκ πειρασμοῦ ῥύεσθαι). Could the phrase suggest the rapture of Rev 3:10 where believers are kept from the hour of trial (ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ)? Peter is aware of the teachings of Paul's letters (2 Pet 3:15,16) and would not be ignorant of the Apostle's teaching on the rapture.

The phrase, "days of Noah," also appears in Peter's first epistle (3:20). The Lord's words in the Olivet Discourse may have given rise to the 1 Peter¹ and the 2 Peter references to Noah. The baptism of 1 Peter 3:21, which corresponds antitypically² to the ark, is the Spirit's baptism which places believers into the church.³ Because we are members of the church through Spirit baptism, Paul declares that we are saved from the Tribulation wrath (1 Thess 5:9,10; Rev 3:10). On the other hand, Peter may not have been thinking of this aspect of salvation when he said that (Spirit) baptism "now saves you" (v. 21). The statement of 4:7 that "the end of all things is at hand," following so closely to the previous application of the case of Noah, could have arisen from the Noah typology.⁴ All these

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 509.

²N.B. that ἀντίτυπον supports a typological view of the flood.

³That Spirit baptism and not water baptism is meant is established by 1) the emphasis on "spirit" (vv. 18,19); 2) the water did not save Noah but was instead an instrument of divine judgment. Heb 11:7 also makes it clear that the ark was the saving instrument for Noah; 3) Peter's first use of Paul's technical term, ἐν χριστῷ (v. 16) prepares the way for thoughts of Spirit baptism; and 4) 4:1-6 parallels Rom 6; Zane C. Hodges, "1 Peter," unpublished class notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975.

⁴Further typological support may be found in 1) 1 Pet 3:20 where Peter describes the patience of God before the flood; 2) 2 Pet 3:9,10 speaks of the patience of God which precedes the day of the Lord; 3) Heb 11:7, which says that Noah was "warned by God about things not yet seen," implies the unseen judgment of the flood. Similarly, the day of the Lord comes as an unexpected thief, with no visible signs to

evidences concerning the scriptural account of the flood have led to the conclusion that the days of Noah typify the prevailing attitude that exists prior to the eschatological judgments of the day of the Lord.

An anticipated objection to this interpretation is the mention of *παρουσία* in verse 37. The days of Noah are compared not with the coming of the day of the Lord, but the Parousia. Since the same word has been used for the post-tribulational return of the Lord elsewhere in the Discourse (24:3,27), should it not refer to that event in verses 37 and 39?¹ It should be remembered, however, that even in the posttribulational scheme, the Parousia includes a rapture and a return of Christ separated in time. The interval is simply confined to a very small portion of the Tribulation period (or posttribulational period).² Therefore, if Scripture warrants a longer interval (and it does),³ objections cannot be sustained on the argument that the Parousia is a single, simplified event.

precede it. Like the days of Noah, the time leading up to the day of the Lord will find mockers who doubt the judgmental intervention of God since there are no signs of cosmic disturbance (contrast Matt 24:29). But they have forgotten the flood (2 Pet 3:3-6).

¹Cf. Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 177.

²Feinberg in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 81.

³Midtribulationists, like pretribulationists, understand the Parousia to involve two stages; Archer in Archer et al., Rapture?, pp. 213-18.

Who is Taken? (vv. 40,41)

Many modern scholars of the pretribulational school do not see the rapture mentioned either here or anywhere else in the Olivet Discourse.¹ The ones who are taken, are taken in judgment, not in rapture.² Posttribulationists, on the other hand, find a rapture here. For them, however, the rapture in verses 40, 41 must be united with the Second Coming of verses 29-31. The result is a posttribulational rapture. But posttribulational chronology of the Discourse does not observe the transitional nature of verse 36 and the *περὶ δέ*. The event of verses 36-44 cannot logically or exegetically join with verses 29-31. But their reasons for seeing a rapture in verses 40, 41 are cogent. Gundry states:

Two different words appear for the action of taking, *αἶρω* (v. 39) and *παραλαμβάνω* (vv. 40,41). The same word could easily have been employed had an exact parallel between the two takings been intended. Instead we have the employment of another word which only two days later describes the rapture (John 14:3). . . . The apostles would naturally have associated the two expressions. Jesus probably so intended, else He would have drawn a distinction. . . . In light of this, the change from *αἶρω* to *παραλαμβάνω* indicates a change in topic and connotation: the former term refers to judgment similar

¹Walvoord, "Posttribulational Rapture in Matthew 24," pp. 264-65; Feinberg in Archer et al., *Rapture?*, pp. 230-31; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 281-82; Barbieri, "Matthew," p. 79; Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," pp. 56, 60; Rand, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 126, 162.

²Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 27-28; Idem, "Posttribulational Rapture in Matthew 24," pp. 264-65; Feinberg in Archer et al., *Rapture?*, pp. 230-31.

in unexpectedness to the Flood, the latter to reception of the saints at the rapture to be forever with their Lord (cf. 1 Thess 4:17; John 14:3).¹

It is generally agreed that παραλαμβάνω means "to take to or with oneself." The thought is always one of accompaniment, usually in a positive sense, i.e., for close fellowship.² But of the forty-nine uses in the NT, Sproule has listed seven which may be used in an unfriendly way.³ Obviously, the context must be the determining factor. To say that the context is one of judgment is basically correct, but this does not solve the problem. The Parousia is also mentioned in the context (vv. 37,39) and either the one taken or the one left could satisfy the stress on judgment. In fact ἀφίημι ("to leave," vv. 40,41) takes on the meaning of "abandon" in its frequent use with personal objects (Matt 4:11; 8:15; 26:44,56, etc.).⁴ Brown thinks that since ἀφίημι is used in Matthew 23:38 for the judgment of the temple, the use of the word in 24:40,41 serves to warn those who are unprepared like in the days of Noah,

¹Gundry, Church and the Tribulation, p. 138.

²TDNT, s.v. "παραλαμβάνω," by Gerhard Delling, 4:13; NIDNTT, s.v. "λαμβάνω," by B. Siede, 3:751.

³Matt 4:5,8; 12:45; 27:27; Luke 11:26; John 19:16; Acts 23:18; Sproule, "Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism," p. 60. A variant in Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D) of Acts 16:35, where one is taken into custody, could be added to the list.

⁴BAGD, p. 126.

that they will be forsaken in judgment like the temple.¹

If the one taken, is taken in judgment, it is strange that a word characterized by personal accompaniment is involved, while the one left to enter the kingdom is described with a word frequently used for the forsaken.

The easiest interpretation is to see in παραλαμβάνω a reference to the pretribulational rapture--a similar use as in John 14:3. Those left are the unbelievers. The judgments of the day of the Lord come upon them and they do not escape (1 Thess 5:3).²

Watchfulness and the Thief Imagery (vv. 42-44)

The 24:42-44 unit contains forceful, paraenetic material. A short parable concerning the thief (v. 43) is

¹Brown, "Matthean Apocalypse," p. 16.

²It is assumed in this passage that the rapture and the day of the Lord are virtually simultaneous as to their inception. Concerning the relation of the rapture to the day of the Lord in 1 Thess 5:9, Thomas writes, "The only way to hold that [the rapture] . . . is an imminent prospect is to see it as simultaneous with the beginning of the divine judgment against earth. Only if the rapture coincides with the beginning of the day of the Lord can both be imminent and the salvation of those in Christ coincide with the coming of wrath to the rest (v. 9)"

"Were either the rapture or the day of the Lord to precede the other, one or the other would cease to be an imminent prospect to which the 'thief in the night' and related expressions (1:10; 4:15,17) are appropriate. That both are any-moment possibilities is why Paul can talk about these two in successive paragraphs. This is how the Lord's personal coming as well as the 'day's' coming can be compared to a thief (2 Peter 3:4,10; Rev 3:3,11; 16:15)." Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," p. 281. Cf. also Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 230.

framed by two similar exhortations to readiness or watchfulness (vv. 42,44). Many pretribulationists¹ and most, if not all, posttribulationists² apply the passage to the Second Advent. But Jeremias observes the difficulty of the thief at night parable in relation to the Second Coming:

But the application of the parable [of the thief at night] to the return of the Son of Man is strange; for if the subject of discourse is a nocturnal burglary, it refers to a disastrous and alarming event, whereas the Parousia, at least for the disciples of Jesus, is the great day of joy.³

Jeremias' solution is no solution at all--to call the passage a misapplication of the truths of the parable.⁴ But Jeremias wants to set aside the reference to the return of the Son of Man, so then the parable will admirably fit the emphasis of the lesson of the flood (vv. 37-39) which warns the unprepared of coming eschatological terrors.⁵

But the tension faced by Jeremias is removed if the subject is the coming day of the Lord for the unsuspecting unbelievers. The thief (at night) imagery is found in several passages, 1 Thessalonians 5:2ff. and 2 Peter

¹E.g. Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse," pp. 28-29; Rand, "Olivet Discourse," p. 309.

²E.g. Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 185; Carson, "Matthew," p. 510.

³Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, trans. S. H. Hooke (rev. ed., NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 49.

⁴Ibid., note 4.

⁵Ibid., p. 49.

3:10¹ being of capital importance. The most convincing connection of Matthew 24:42-44 with 1 Thessalonians 5:2ff. may be found by looking at the Synoptic parallel to Matthew: Luke 21:34-36. In this passage, at least six terms are discovered to be identical with those in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 including "suddenly" (αἰφνίδιος), "come" (ἐφίστημι), "escape" (ἐκφύγω), "the (that) day" (ἡ ἡμέρα [ἐκείνη]), "watch" (γρηγορέω), and "be drunk" (μεθύω).² Since the NT uses αἰφνίδιος in only these two passages, this similarity of language is strengthened.³

Paul⁴ and Peter have apparently based their symbol of the thief upon the parable of Jesus.⁵ What is also interesting is that Revelation 3:3 and 16:15 suggest Christ Himself comes as a thief, while 1 Thessalonians 5:4 makes it clear that the day of the Lord comes as a thief. The

¹2 Pet 3:10 adds in the majority text ἐν νυκτὶ following κλέπτῃς and therefore contains the identical phrase to that in 1 Thess 5:2. Matthew, of course, does not mention that the thief comes at night.

²Cf. C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 123, note 2. Perhaps the drunkenness of 1 Thess 5:6,7 may be found in the wicked servant of Matt 24:49; Waterman, "Source of Paul's Teaching," p. 111.

³Cf. Moo in Archer et al., Rapture?, p. 185.

⁴Note that Luke was with Paul in Thessalonica for part of the Apostle's stay there (Acts 16:11-13; 17:1).

⁵Jeremias, Parables, p. 50; Dodd, Parables, p. 133; cf. also Howard, "Parousia: Mark," p. 155; Waterman, "Source of Paul's Teaching," pp. 110-11.

impression is that the two events are simultaneous. First Thessalonians 4 and its discussion of the pretribulational rapture is similarly juxtaposed with 1 Thessalonians 5 and has reference to the day of the Lord.¹

The disciples know² that the master of the house would be watching if he knew when the thief would arrive (v. 43). The master of the house would be ready. So they also (emphatic καὶ ὑμεῖς) are to be ready. "The householder would have watched, if he had known; the disciples must watch, because they do not know" [original emphasis].³

Conclusion

A serious dilemma exists if verse 36 has reference to the Second Coming of verses 29-31. But by observing the transitional nature of the *περὶ δέ* construction which introduces verse 36, the exegete may perceive the beginning of a slightly new subject matter--that of the coming of the day of the Lord/pretribulational rapture of the church. The terms "that day" and "(that) hour" are influenced by the concept of the day of the Lord. Verse 36, therefore, concerns the unpredictability of the coming of that eschatological event.

¹See p. 244, note 2.

²γινώσκετε in v. 43 is probably indicative rather than imperative; Carson, "Matthew," p. 510.

³Lambrecht, "Parousia Discourse," p. 327, note 50.

The Noahic illustration also pictures the coming judgments of the day of the Lord. Life before the flood as a portrait of the future in Matthew, parallels Paul's concept of the world attitude that prevails prior to the thief-like advent of the day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:1-3). Additionally, as early as the OT and confirmed in the NT, the flood has become typological of the coming eschatological judgments (i.e., the Tribulation or seventieth week). As the flood swept away the unsuspecting pagans of the flood era, so the unsuspecting unbeliever will be swept away in the judgment of the Tribulation wrath. He will not escape.

In light of the fact that the text changes verbs from verse 39 (αἴρω) to verses 40, 41 (παραλαμβάνω), it is logical to see in the latter verb a taking for fellowship at the rapture rather than a taking in judgment at the Second Coming. The contrasting word, ἀφίημι, can then take on its common meaning of "abandon" when used with personal objects. The use of the thief imagery harmonizes well with this exegesis. This imagery is found in 1 Thessalonians 5 and 2 Peter 3 with reference to the coming of the day of the Lord. But Christians will be saved from the day of the Lord and His wrath (1 Thess 5:9,10) by means of the rapture (1 Thess 4:13-18).

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Context to the Discourse

The thesis of this paper has been to demonstrate the dominant eschatological nature of the Olivet Discourse. At the same time, it has been held that the A.D. 70 event may at times typify future events. The Lament of Jerusalem (23:36-39) with its indirect mention of Israel's gathering before the Second Advent of Christ (v. 39), helps set the stage for the eschatological emphasis of the Discourse. Matthew 24:1-2 also forms part of the previous context leading up to the Discourse. These verses declare the coming destruction of the temple. Verses 1-2 may refer to the A.D. 70 event from which Jesus makes a transition into the future concerns at verses 3-4, or the destruction of the temple described in verses 1-2 may in reality portray a siege of Jerusalem yet to take place in the Tribulation period. Regardless, clear evidence points to the fact that the Discourse itself begins with 24:3-4, not 24:1-2. The change of location and distinctive Matthean discourse terminology at these verses shows this claim to be valid. Therefore, explicit prophecies about the A.D. 70 event may

be left behind at 24:1-2; eschatological concerns are now brought to the forefront.

The question of the disciples (24:3) reflects in their mind a single complex event involving the fall of Jerusalem, the Parousia, and the consummation of the age. Yet the text (using the majority reading in v. 3, τῆς συντελείας) warrants the division of the unified question into three components: the time of all these events, the sign of the Parousia, and the sign of the consummation of the age.

The Discourse as a Chiasmus

Matthew is fond of chiasmus. It would not be strange if chiasmus was found to be a helpful key into the structure and chronology of the Discourse. The exegesis of the Discourse has, in fact, opened the door to the following chiasmus in Matthew chapter 24:

The Disciples' Question (v. 3):

- A. The Time When These Eschatological Events Take Place (v. 3a)
- B. The Sign of the Second Coming (v. 3b)
- C. The Sign of the Consummation of the Age (v. 3c)

The Lord's Answer (vv. 4-44):

- C.¹ The Sign of the Consummation of the Age (vv. 4-28)
- B.¹ The Sign of the Second Coming (vv. 29-35)
- A.¹ The Time When These Eschatological Events Take Place (vv. 36-44)

This structure suggests that verses 4-28 answer the third

question of the disciples, "what is the sign of the consummation of the age?" The Lord declares that there will be many signs indeed (vv. 4-8), but these signs do not mean the end has come (v. 6). Widespread persecution and lawlessness must also take place (vv. 9-13), and the gospel of the kingdom (i.e., the good news of the millennial reign of the resurrected Christ) must be preached throughout the whole world before this age will close (v. 14). But the primary sign of the consummation of the age will be the abomination of desolation (v. 15), at which the people of Judea are to flee (vv. 16-20). The Great Tribulation will follow (vv. 21-26) climaxing in the everywhere-visible return of Christ (vv. 27-28).

The second question of the disciples was concerning the sign of the Lord's return. The Lord's answer is given in verses 29-35. Cosmic phenomena will precede His Advent (v. 29) as will a special sign of the Son of Man (v. 30). Then He will return with power and glory, and gather His elect (vv. 30-31). The desire of the disciples in asking for the sign of the Lord's return was to know when He would return. In the lesson from the fig tree (vv. 32-35), the Lord instructs His disciples in how to know when His Coming is near (v. 33). The signs of the Tribulation ("all these things," v. 33) form a sign of His near return.

The third question, "when will these eschatological events take place?," is addressed by the Lord in verses

36-44. That a new aspect of the disciples' question is being answered seems evident from the use of $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \delta\epsilon^1$ (v. 36). As to the coming of the day of the Lord (=Tribulation), no one knows. The unexpected nature of the coming day of the Lord is like those who were unsuspecting of the flood (vv. 37-39). The rapture will take one to be with the Lord, while another will be left to experience the Tribulational judgments (vv. 40-41). Since the Tribulation will come as suddenly and unexpectedly as a thief at night (vv. 42-44), constant readiness is all important.

The Teaching of the Discourse

The Sign of the Consummation of the Age (vv. 4-28)

Verses 4-8 have every indication that they mark the beginning of the Tribulation period, especially with the statement that these signs of wars, famines, etc., are the "beginning of birth pangs" (v. 8). This word ($\acute{\omega}\delta\acute{\iota}\nu$, "birth pangs") is nearly a technical term, implying the catastrophes of Daniel's seventieth week. The signs described in the text also parallel the Tribulation judgments described in Revelation 6:3-8.

The Great Tribulation is discussed in verses 9-14. The transition to the second half of the seventieth week is

¹This phrase is used to introduce the response to specific questions in 1 Cor 7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1 and 16:1. This may be the use of the phrase in 1 Thess 4:9 and 5:1.

marked by a sequential *róte* (v. 9). The contrasting nature of the 4-8 and 9-14 units also suggests a different eschatological period is in view. The terminology including "tribulation," "the many," "lawlessness," "stumbling," "deception," etc. are all latent with eschatological impressions. Therefore, the whole period of the Tribulation has been rehearsed in verses 4-14 from start to finish.

In keeping with a common Hebrew style of writing, verses 15-28 recapitulate verses 9-14, specifying and highlighting the abomination of desolation. The abomination of desolation, it was shown, has reference to the future sacrilegious act of the Antichrist which takes place in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. This approach is able to maintain the unity of Scripture on the subject as revealed in Daniel 9, 2 Thessalonians 2, Revelation 13, and others. This abominable act by the Antichrist will constitute the chief sign of the consummation since the disciples are dramatically warned to flee when they see it, and since the Great Tribulation follows, in which the total extinction of the human race is threatened (v. 22). The Great Tribulation cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely, but must be "cut short" (v. 22) by the coming of Christ immediately after the Tribulation (v. 29). God has in mind particularly His elect Jewish believers of the Tribulation. Deceptions about the location of the returning Messiah will run high. But the Lord's return will be unmistakably visible to all.

The Sign of the Second Coming (vv. 29-35)

The phrase, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days" (v. 24), helps establish the soundness of the eschatological exegesis of 4-28. There is no need to revert to a symbolic, historicizing interpretation, nor to understand other strained exigencies to harmonize 29-31 with the preceding material. The Matthean order is clear: cosmic upheaval, the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man (most likely a display of Shekinah glory), the repentant mourning of the Jewish tribes of Palestine, the coming of the Son of Man Himself, and the gathering of all the Jewish believers into the land of Israel in preparation for the Millennium. This order works against all conceptions of a posttribulational rapture in verses 29-31.

In the fig tree parable, the Lord taught that His return was near when the signs of the Tribulation period had begun. This was likened to the budding of the fig tree. It signaled the approach of summer. So the premonitory signs of the seventieth week signal the nearness of Christ's return and the end of all things. Additionally, the blossoming of the fig tree may symbolize the approaching blessings of the millennial kingdom which follow the Second Advent. The disciples can be assured that those who see the beginning of these signs, i.e., the generation of the Tribulation, will also see Christ's return. This assurance was given to confirm the nearness of the Second Coming to

these signs.

The Time When These Eschatological Events Take Place

Verse 36 records the time when the catastrophes of the Tribulation will come, i.e., when the events beginning in verse 4 will take place. The transition to this aspect of the disciples' question is marked by *περὶ δέ*. Viewing the 36-44 unit as addressing the time of the arrival of the day of the Lord or Tribulation solves the difficulties in attempting to harmonize the imminent Parousia (v. 36ff.) with the Parousia which is preceded by a specific chronology of events (vv. 29-31). The terms "that day" and "(that) hour" seemed to be chosen to point to the day of the Lord. The typology of the days of Noah also suggests the imminent arrival of a destruction which comes upon unbelievers. But the day of the Lord will not come upon the church saints (1 Thess 5:4) because they are destined to be delivered from this Tribulation wrath (1 Thess 5:9) by means of the pre-tribulational rapture (1 Thess 4:13-18). Likewise, Jesus taught that some would be taken (in rapture) while others would be left to face His wrath in the Tribulation (Matt 24:40,41). To show that those taken, are taken to be with Christ and not taken in judgment, Matthew has been careful to change from his word for those taken in judgment at the flood (*αἴρω*, v. 39) to a word for taking to one's side

(παραλαμβάνω, vv. 40,41).

Finally, Jesus speaks a brief parable of a thief in order to illustrate the sudden and unexpected nature of this event. Both Paul (1 Thess 5:2ff.) and Peter (2 Pet 3:10) use the same imagery of a nocturnal burglar in their descriptions of the imminent day of the Lord. All of these evidences join to establish the fact that the coming of the rapture and the day of the Lord cannot be known. In fact, the time of these simultaneous events is hidden in the wisdom of the eternal Father. While the Second Coming of Christ (vv. 29-31) is proclaimed explicitly (vv. 32-35) by the signs that precede it (vv. 4-28), the day of the Lord/rapture is an imminent event (vv. 36-44) that demands the utmost preparation and readiness of life. "For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will" (v. 44).

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