

Are There Any Signs of His Coming in the Church Age?

📖 Matthew 23:37-24:31

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Introduction

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

The views of Matt 24:4-14 by modern dispensationalists fall into two basic categories. First, historical-futurists view portions of Matthew 24:4-14 as being fulfilled historically, during the present Church age and other parts as having fulfillment during the future 70th week of Daniel. Second, strict futurists view all of Matthew 24:4-14 as being fulfilled in the future, during the 70th week. The difference between these two basic categories is important since it relates to how one interprets events in the church age, especially the significance of false Christs, wars, earthquakes, famines and pestilence.

My primary approach is to research what the biblical text says, not to consider how similar a current event may appear to a description in a text. Proper exegesis always comes first, and then only afterwards should current events be evaluated as to how they may or may not relate to that exegesis. Even then, our exegesis must constantly be re-evaluated in light of a further evidence that we may have missed. This paper has come about as the result of teaching through the entire Gospel of Matthew over the last few years and discussions that began with Robert Dean who was also teaching through the Gospel at the same time. His paper will follow mine and take up Matthew 24:32-25:46. We both came to the conviction that the Olivet Discourse relates to Jewish issues asked by Jewish representatives of the future believing remnant and therefore require a futurist fulfillment only during the 70th week of Daniel.

Before presenting the views held by modern dispensationalists, I want to make mention of some of the men I will quote and am indebted to; Darby, Scofield, Chafer, Gaebelien, Walvoord, McClain, Pentecost, Ryrie, Whitcomb, Toussaint, Fruchtenbaum, etc...are all men that I respect. I consider them to be the shoulders of

giants upon which I stand. Therefore, if I disagree with them or others whom I cite, I mean nothing ill toward any of them. They are all instruments God has used to promote sound teaching to His people. My demeanor then, will be one of Christian humility and love, and with the hope that we are all most interested in what the word of God teaches, rather than having our view espoused.

Views Held by Modern Dispensationalists¹

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

Historical-Future Views

Intercalation View

Darby considered the discourse to concern the Jews and Jerusalem as the center of the system before God. The subject is God's government of the earth and the judgments to take place at Christ's coming, putting an end to the existing age. Verses 4-14 speak of the general condition of the disciples and of the world during the time of the testimony. The testimony is the administration of the gospel of the kingdom *in the land of Israel*. This administration occurs as long as there are a people, temple and city. Therefore, Darby considered verses 4-14 to be fulfilled between AD30 and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, with an intercalation between verse 14 and

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

² Many more views of dispensationalists are considered by Leonardo Costa at <https://i-disp.com/the-fulfillment-of-matthew-24-31-in-dispensational-tradition/>

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

15, and a continuation of fulfillment taking place in the times of the abomination of desolation.⁴ In his own words,

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

It seems then, that Darby saw a portion of the discourse fulfilled early on in Church history, while the gospel of the kingdom was still being preached in the land of Israel, a gap of time where no fulfillment is taking place beginning in AD70, and a resumption of fulfillment in the future 70th week of Daniel. His interpretation related very strongly to the Jews being in the land with a city of Jerusalem. In light of the establishment of the Modern State of Israel in 1948 and Jerusalem coming under Jewish control in 1967, we don't know how Darby would have responded. But his synopsis led him to only mention events in the future 70th week.

Interestingly, Toussaint follows a similar approach as Darby. In his commentary, *Behold the King*, verses 4-6 were fulfilled to the disciples between AD33-70 and verses 7-14 will be fulfilled in the first half of the Tribulation. There is an intercalation in his view as well, similar to Darby.

The strength of both views is that they both see the discourse as related to Israel only, even when they see partial fulfillment during the Church age until AD70. But there are also weaknesses to the view. The first weakness is that there were no "false Christs" between AD30 and AD70. Some have claimed there were, such as Gentry and DeMar, but their suggestions, on closer inspection, reveal they were false prophets. False Christ's and false prophets are not the same thing. One who claims to be a false Christ is claiming to be the Messiah. Ice said, "We possess no *historical* record of any false Messiahs having appeared *previous to the destruction of Jerusalem*."⁶ Therefore, it is unlikely that Matthew 24:4-5 were fulfilled between AD30 and 70. The second weakness is that the birth pangs are not adequately dealt with. Darby claimed that the birth pangs began in verse 4, and that this was fulfilled between AD30-70. But by definition the birth pangs do not begin in the early days of the pregnancy, but in the final hours. Toussaint says the birth pangs begin in verse 7 so that he avoids this difficulty. But it is

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

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

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

arbitrary to begin the birth pangs in verse 7 and not included verses 4-5. The third weakness is that an intercalation in fulfillment is contrary to the illustration of the fig tree. Matthew 24:34 says “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” While there are arguments *ad infinitum* on the meaning of “this generation” (ἡ γενεα αὐτῆς), it is clear from the illustration that the meaning is “the generation that “sees all these things” (cf. especially 24:33). They occur within the same growing season. It is not possible then, to say that some of Matthew 24:4-14 was fulfilled in the 1st century, while the rest will be fulfilled in the 70th week.

Having evaluated the intercalation view of Darby and Toussaint, I want to make note that there is handwritten evidence by Toussaint that he did not always maintain the view presented in his commentary, and this note is made in a paper by John Benson, which I have attached as Exhibit A.⁷ In this exhibit Toussaint wrote that he saw all of 24:4-14 as being fulfilled in the future Tribulation, thus rejecting the intercalation view.

General and Specific View

Scofield views verses 4-14 as a general description of the present church age gathering into an awful intensity at the end of the age.⁸ By the “end of the age” he means the 70th week of Daniel. He saw the gospel of the kingdom in 24:14 as being preached by the Jewish remnant in the 70th week, “during the great tribulation, and immediately preceding the coming of the King in glory.”⁹ Walvoord follows Scofield very closely. He said Matthew 24:4-14 is

*...describing the general characteristic of the age leading up to the end, while at the same time recognizing that the prediction of the difficulties, which will characterize the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ, are fulfilled in an intensified form as the age moves on to its conclusion.*¹⁰

This view, while somewhat vague, does have the strength of seeing 24:14 as being the very end of the great tribulation. However, it has a number of deficiencies. First, it is a double interpretation. Scofield even stated that “Verses 4 to 14 have a double interpretation.”¹¹ One interpretation of earthquakes is general throughout the Church age, and another interpretation is specific, during the 70th week. This violates sound grammatical-historical hermeneutics. A passage can only have one interpretation. Once multiple interpretations are admitted,

⁷ John L. Benson, “Re-Thinking the Mystery Form of the Kingdom” (Bible Baptist School of Theology, 1974).

⁸ C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 1033.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1343.

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come, A Commentary on the First Gospel*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1974), 183.

¹¹ Scofield, 1033.

there are no controls on the interpreter's imagination. Second, the birth pangs are not adequately dealt with. If all of vv 4-14 are the birth pangs both in general throughout the Church age and specifically in the Tribulation, then the entire Church age is the birth pangs? This is too broad an understanding of "birth pangs." The OT described the birth pangs as a specific set of pains the world would undergo in connection with the day of the Lord (e.g. Isa 13:8-9), and did not apply them to the natural order of events. Third, as mentioned in the previous critique, it is contrary to the illustration of the fig tree, which indicates that one generation will see all these things. What meaning does Matt 24:34 have once you admit these things are "at least partially fulfilled"¹² in a general way throughout the Church age? What "generation" did not pass away until all these things took place? The only solution is to take a non-contextual interpretation of *η γενεα αυτη*, such as "the nation Israel," and argue that the nation Israel will continue in existence until these prophecies take place. But that is not the meaning of the fig tree illustration. The meaning is that one generation will see all these things take place.

Chronological Historic and Future View

Chafer insisted that Jesus is addressing Israel, not the Church and made clear that the Church is an intercalation in God's 70-week calendar with Israel, beginning at the Triumphal Entry. He states that "There is not a thing here ever connected to the Church and to the true Christian that is addressed to them or may be applied to them,"¹³ insisting that they knew nothing of the Church age, nor anything even of the Church at all. 24:4-5 warns Jews not to accept a false Christ. 24:4-8 are events of the Church age leading up to the Tribulation. He stresses that the extent of this time period is unknown and that the Church is raptured in 24:8, though it is not mentioned by Jesus. 24:9 is the beginning of the Tribulation.

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

Cooper¹⁴ and Fruchtenbaum¹⁵ outline a refined version of Chafer's view. Cooper seems to argue that the false Messiah's in 24:4-5 would appear to the apostles. This period has already been noted to have not had any false Messiahs historically reported. Fruchtenbaum argues that false Messiahs would appear throughout the Church age and cites several who have appeared, beginning with Bar Kochba in AD132-135. This seems to add

¹² Walvoord, 183.

¹³ Louis S. Chafer, "The Olivet Discourse, Part 1" <http://www.dts.edu/media/play/olivet-discourse-part-one/?audio=true>

¹⁴ David L. Cooper, "The Olivet Discourse" <http://promisestoisrael.org/the-olivet-discourse/>

¹⁵ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 624-632.

legitimacy to the idea that 24:4-5 are being fulfilled throughout the Church age. Further, Cooper and Fruchtenbaum argue that wars and rumors of wars in 24:6 will take place throughout the Church age. These are local wars that are not prophetically significant because they do not herald the end. They interpret 24:7, "nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" as WWI (Cooper and Fruchtenbaum) and WWII (Fruchtenbaum).¹⁶ 24:7 adds "famines" and "earthquakes" to WWI and WWII as the first birth pangs. Therefore, the birth pangs began with WWI and continue to this day. 24:9 is viewed as the beginning of the first half of the Tribulation.

This view has much to commend it. There have been false Messiahs throughout most of the Church age. There have been local wars and rumors of wars. There have been large conflicts, namely WWI and WWII, and earthquakes and famines in various places. However, there are also deficiencies to this view. First, the wars in verse 6 and 7 are the same wars, not different wars. The explanatory *γὰρ* in verse 7 indicates that Jesus is explaining or clarifying the "wars and rumors of wars" of verse 6. Therefore, the "wars and rumors of wars" are defined as "nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom." This means the wars will be coalitions of nations against coalitions of other nations. The explanatory *γὰρ* connects these two verses and does not allow for a separation as this view insists.¹⁷ Second, it is too speculative to argue that WWI and WWII fulfilled verse 7, "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." The argument usually rests on the fact that this phrase is an "idiom" pointing "to a total conflict of the area in view."¹⁸ The total area in view in the Olivet Discourse is "the whole world." The conclusion is drawn that the first time such a conflict occurred was WWI. However, historians still argue whether WWI was really the first truly global war or whether a war like The Seven Years War or the Napoleonic Wars preceded them, since battles were fought on several continents. Most agree that the key fronts of WWI were only in Europe and that the fighting was more widespread in WWII. None of these wars were fought on American soil, though they were fought on American sea. It really all hinges on how one defines a world war. If it requires fighting on every continent and every nation, then no war has ever been a world war. If it requires that the war 'reach' every continent and every nation by some kind of impact, then it's possible, but this is still under debate.¹⁹ When such questions remain, one should be cautious. Third, the expression "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" is better connected to the second seal in Rev 6:4. The phrases idiomatic meaning of total conflict of the area in view fits perfectly with the second

¹⁶ Cooper was writing before WWII.

¹⁷ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 189ff.

¹⁸ Fruchtenbaum, 94.

¹⁹ "Heather Jones, "WWI: Was it really the first world war?" June 29, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-28057198>

seal in Rev 6:4 which describes the rider on the red horse being “granted to take peace from the earth.” This is a truly global conflict.²⁰ It occurs in the first half of the Tribulation. Why not connect Jesus’ words of Matt 24:7 with Rev 6:4? Is it not a better interpretation of Jesus’ words than speculating about past wars that *may* fit the bill, but *may not*. Even Cooper was cautious on this point and said, “Here one must be very cautious and avoid dogmatism.”²¹ Fourth, the earthquake data from the 20th century shows a slight decrease in frequency and intensity. Biblical creationist and geologist, Steve Austin, has shown from the data held by the National Earthquake Information Center that in the 20th century there was an overall slight decrease in earthquake frequency and that during the latter half of the 20th century there was a slight decrease in earthquakes registering 7.0 or greater on the Richter scale, relative to the earlier half of the 20th century.²² In light of this, wouldn’t it be better to connect Jesus’ mention of “earthquakes” in 24:7 to the sixth seal in Rev 6:12-17? There we are told that “there was a great earthquake” and “every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” Why speculate that past earthquakes are fulfilling what Jesus said when we have a parallel earthquake during the first half of the Tribulation? Fifth, it does not deal adequately with the birth pangs. If the birth pangs began with WWI then they have been going on for over 100 years now. In comparison to the last 2,000 years of Church history that is too long to fit the birth pangs metaphor.²³ Birth pangs are compact and occur with increasing magnitude and less time in between each convulsion. We have not seen this escalation in wars or earthquakes or famines. Sixth, it does not fit with the illustration of the fig tree. The fig tree illustrates that the generation that sees these things will see *all* of these things, that is, all the birth pangs that lead to Messiah’s coming. Those who saw WWI did not see all these things. Seventh, 24:9 is not a good description of what will happen to Israel at the beginning of the Tribulation. 24:9 says, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be

²⁰ One may try to argue that “earth” (Gk. γῆ) should be translated “land,” as a reference to the land of Israel. However, consistency would demand that the peace under the first seal was also only Israel. That may be maintained on the basis of Dan 9:27 peace treaty. However, would one be willing to stay consistent with that into the third and fourth seals? Are these for Israel only? The fourth seal is death of a fourth of the earth’s population. Or is this to just be interpreted as a fourth of the Jews. Such a local interpretation does not seem plausible in light of the fact that this is the seals occur in the first half of the Tribulation, and Israel is under the security of the anti-Christ until the mid-point.

²¹ <http://promisestoisrael.org/the-olivet-discourse/>

²² Steven A. Austin, Ph.D. 1998. Twentieth Century Earthquakes – Confronting an Urban Legend. *Acts & Facts*. 27(1).

²³ A typical pregnancy is 40 weeks’ gestation. Even if the birth took 24 hours, which is abnormally long, the ratio of gestation to birth pangs would be 420:1. Compare that with the 20:1 ratio that would be required for the birth pangs to have started with WWI. This example is for perspective only, not for specificity that would lead to any date-setting venture.

hated by all nations because of My name.” This happens at the midpoint, not at the beginning. At the beginning the anti-Christ will enter into league with the nation Israel and provide security for them for the first three and a half years. Then at the midpoint the believing Jewish remnant will be delivered to tribulation and killed and hated by all nations. Therefore, 24:9 is not the beginning of the first half, but the beginning of the second half. 24:4-5, would be a much better description of the beginning, since the anti-Christ will come at that time and mislead many. Therefore, 24:9-14 is not a good description of the first half of the Tribulation.

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

Futurist Views

Chronological Future 1st Half View

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

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

He was convinced there was perfect harmony between all three. This was a large step in moving away from partial fulfillment views to a full futurist view. He frankly stated that things like wars, earthquakes, pestilence and famine in this present age are only faint shadows of what is to come at the beginning of the 70th week. Variations of his view are followed by McClain,²⁵ Ryrie.²⁶ McClean²⁷ and Bigalke.²⁸

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

²⁵ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1959), 362-369.

²⁶ “Verses 4-14 list characteristics of the first half of the tribulation period, whereas verses 15-28 deal with the second half.” Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*. Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1559.

McClean went the farthest in terms of refining this view and there is much to commend. Exegesis shows a strong connection between Matthew 24:4-14 and the seals in Revelation 6:1-17. Such a close connection could not just be incidental. The birth pangs are limited to the 70th week, with the beginning taking place in the first half and the end being more intense until the end of the second half. This fits well with the birth pangs metaphor. However, this view also has some weaknesses. First, Matt 24:9 is not a description of the martyrs under the altar under the fifth seal in Rev 6:9-11. When Jesus says “you” He is referring to the future Jewish remnant. He said, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.” The “nations” who will hate them are the Gentiles. Gentile hatred and persecution will not happen to Jewish believers at the fifth seal because they are under the protection of the anti-Christ at that time. Instead it will begin at the midpoint when Satan is cast out of heaven to persecute Israel on earth (Rev 12). The martyrs under the altar must refer to believers in general during the first half of the Tribulation. Therefore, Matt 24:9 is not a description of the martyrs under the altar during the fifth seal, but a description of the midpoint, when the nations of the world turn against and try to destroy Israel. Second, the first half of the Tribulation does not end in verse 14 because verse 14 is the end of the birth pangs altogether, which is the end of the second half. “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Many early expositors including Darby, Scofield, Walvoord and Whitcomb recognized that this verse describes the very end of the birth pangs, which is the end of the second half and therefore cannot be the end of the first half. Third, the placement of the phrase “the beginning of birth pangs” is in the wrong verse in this view, and should be in verse 14. But verse 14 says “then the end will come,” indicating it is the end of the second half. In other words, if verse 14 was the end of the first half, it would have made more sense to state in verse 14 that this is “the beginning of the birth pangs.” But Jesus said instead, “then the end will come.” Therefore, while this view is better than the historic-future views, it is still not the best.

Chronological Future 1st and 2nd Half View

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

There seems to be evidence to support the view that the first half of the week is described in verses 4-8. The parallelism between verses 4-8 and Revelation 6 seems to indicate that the first half of the tribulation is here

²⁷ John McClean, “Chronology and Sequential Structure of John’s Revelation” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 323-326, 337.

²⁸ Ron J. Bigalke, “A Comparison of the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation.”

described....There are indications that verses 9-26 describe the events of the last half of the week. The abomination of desolation (24:15) is clearly stated by Daniel (9:27) to appear in the middle of the week and continue to the end of the period. The word "then" in verse 9 seems to introduce the great persecutions against Israel that were promised them and were described in Revelation 12:12-17, where John reveals that this persecution will last for the last half of the tribulation period (Rev. 12:14).²⁹

This view, or a close version of it is followed by Whitcomb,³⁰ Barbieri,³¹ Showers³² and Enns.³³ It is my conviction that this is view that best represents the text. It places all the events within the time frame of the 70th week and avoids speculation about what constitutes fulfillment of prophecy. It also solves the problem of 24:32-34 which seems to indicate by the fig tree illustration, that the generation that sees these things will see *all* these things, thus compacting the events together in a single season.

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

The Book Context

The Argument of the Gospel of Matthew

Too often a study of the discourse begins with Matthew 24 rather than the argument of the Gospel of Matthew. When taken apart from the entire argument, one similarity,³⁴ word,³⁵ phrase³⁶ or concept³⁷ can be used to

²⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 1st Grand Rapids printing (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1964), 278-279.

³⁰ John C. Whitcomb, interview by author, October 24, 2017.

³¹ Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 76.

³² Renald E. Showers, *The Sign of His Coming*, (Bellmawr: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 2016) 9-77.

³³ Paul P. Enns, "Olivet Discourse" in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 287.

³⁴ E.g. Often the mention of earthquakes in 24:7 is associated with present earthquakes and a rise in earthquake activity in the 20th and 21st century. However, nothing is mentioned in Matt 24:7 about an increase in earthquakes. Furthermore, earthquakes have been occurring at least since the Flood of Noah and the greatest

present a seemingly strong case for portions of the discourse referring to events in the Church age. However, taken inside Matthew's argument these points break down.

While Jesus gave the discourse, Matthew selected the material to include in order to make his argument. Most recognize, even from earliest times, that the book has a particularly Jewish flavor.³⁸ Matthew is presenting his argument to Jewish believers. His argument is two-fold; Jesus is indeed the King even though Jesus' kingdom did not come (Matt 1-11). The reason the kingdom did not come is because the kingdom's arrival in history is contingent on Israel's repentance. When Israel rejected the King (Matt 12)³⁹ the kingdom was postponed and the King began to prepare His disciples for an interadvent age (Matt 13-28). Matthew's Gospel would serve to strengthen the Jewish believer's faith as well as assist in apologetic outreach to unbelieving Jews.

earthquakes known occurred in the distant past. Even the geological data from the USGS during the 20th century shows that the greatest intensity and quantity of earthquakes peaked in the 1940's. Therefore, just because earthquakes are mentioned in the discourse does not mean that they are descriptive of earthquakes we have experienced in the 20th century. Similarity does not mean identity.

³⁵ E.g. Sometimes *παραλαμβάνεται* in Matt 24:40 and 41 is linked to *παραλημψομαι* in John 14:3 to prove that Matt 24:36-41 is Jesus' teaching concerning the rapture rather than the Second Coming. However, there are stronger arguments against such a connection. Use of *παραλαμβάνω* in a positive context, as in John 14:3, should not be imported into Matthew 24:40-41, especially when the context makes clear that those who were taken (*αἰρω*) during the flood were unbelievers (Matt 24:39) and the same analogy applies to the coming of the Son of Man with those "taken" (*παραλαμβάνω*). *Αἰρω* and *παραλαμβάνω* are clearly being used as synonyms contextually.

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

³⁷ E.g. Sometimes the concept of imminence in Matt 24:36 is linked to the rapture, resulting in the conclusion that the verse is about the rapture rather than the Second Coming. However, this contradicts the use of Son of Man as related to the kingdom (Dan 7:13-14) and violates the context of Jesus' words (24:27, 30).

³⁸ "Irenaeus says: "Matthew issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews," and "The Gospel of St. Matthew was written for the Jews." Origen says, "St. Matthew wrote for the Hebrew." Eusebius says: "Matthew...delivered his gospel to his countrymen." The complexion and content of the Gospel abundantly confirm this view. Cf. Graham Scroggie, *Guide to Gospels*, p. 248. Cited by Toussaint, 18.

³⁹ This was the informal rejection of the King. The formal rejection would take place later, leading to the crucifixion.

The Five Discourses

In keeping with the argument, the five discourses all teach something about Israel and the Messianic kingdom, not the Church. The first discourse is Matthew 5-7, the Discourse on Kingdom Righteousness.⁴⁰ In this discourse Jesus explains the kind of righteousness one generation of Israel will need for the kingdom to come.⁴¹ The second discourse is Matthew 10, the Discourse on Kingdom Missions. In this discourse Jesus explains the missionary enterprise to Israel whenever the kingdom is at hand.⁴² The third discourse is Matthew 13, the Discourse on Kingdom Postponement. In this discourse Jesus explains that the kingdom will be postponed and reveals new truths about the characteristics of the age leading up to the kingdom's establishment. He does not teach that the kingdom of the heavens has a mystery form. The meaning of the kingdom of the heavens continues to have the same meaning it did before Matthew 13, that is, the covenanted, prophesied Messianic Kingdom envisioned and hoped for by all the prophets. New truths are being revealed about, concerning or related to that kingdom.⁴³ Therefore, none of the parables in Matthew 13 reveal the Church. The Church is first revealed in Matt 16:18, which is chronologically after Matthew 13. The fourth discourse is Matthew 18, the Discourse on Kingdom Greatness. Here Jesus explains how a believer living during the postponement can be great in the kingdom to come. The fifth discourse is Matthew 24-25, the Discourse on Kingdom Coming. In this discourse Jesus explains the events that will immediately precede the kingdom's arrival in history and the judgments that will take place when He comes.

The reason for reviewing each of the discourses is to highlight the fact that none of the material Matthew chose to record in the discourses relates directly to the Church,⁴⁴ but directly to Israel and the Messianic kingdom. This

⁴⁰ Known traditionally as *The Sermon on the Mount*, but this tells us only the historical location of the discourse, and little about the content. I prefer to refer to each discourse by its content.

⁴¹ It is not a self-righteousness like the Pharisees, garnered through keeping a misinterpretation of the law, but an imputed righteousness that comes only through faith in Messiah.

⁴² The kingdom was "at hand" in the past during the first advent and will be "at hand" again in the future 70th week. This discourse deals with both time periods.

⁴³ See Mike Stallard, "Hermeneutics and Matthew 13, Part II: Exegetical Conclusions", (paper presented at the Conservative Theological Society, Fort Worth, 2001).

⁴⁴ They do relate indirectly. For example, the Church age falls within the age of postponement, but it is not identical to the age of postponement. The postponement is larger, beginning with the national rejection of the Messiah, while the Church began on the day of Pentecost. The Church will end on the day of the pre-trib Rapture, while the postponement will end with Israel's acceptance of the Messiah. So there is a relationship of some of the discourses to the Church, in particular Matthew 13 and Matthew 18, but it is only indirect, as the truths hold for the entire period of postponement.

is because Matthew's argument is that Jesus is the King, but His kingdom did not come because that generation of Israel failed to have a righteousness that enabled them to recognize Him as their King.⁴⁵ As such the kingdom has been postponed until a later generation of Israel repents. The discourse in Matt 24-25 describes the conditions in the world that will bring Israel to repentance, issuing in the return of the King and His judgments.

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

The immediate context for the discourse begins after Jesus' scathing rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. After this rebuke in Matthew 23:37-39 the King laments Israel's rejection saying, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gather's her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"⁴⁶ Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel, including the capital of the kingdom of heaven. Jerusalem is personification for the nation Israel. Jesus had come to gather Israel into the kingdom (Matt 10:5-7), but they were not willing. As a consequence of their rejection, their house, the Temple in Jerusalem, would be destroyed.⁴⁷ Furthermore, their King would be absent until they utter the Messianic Greeting of Ps 118:26, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" This provides the immediate setting for the discourse and establishes that the audience of the discourse is the future Jewish remnant (the generation that sees these things) being addressed through His believing disciples.⁴⁸

The Disciples' Questions (24:1-3)

In 24:1-3 the disciples came out from the temple and were pointing out the beautiful temple buildings presently under construction according to Herod the Great's design. Jesus remarked in verse 2 that "not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." This prompted their questions in verse 3, as "He was sitting on the Mount of Olives," "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

⁴⁵ Acts 13:27 says they did not "recognize neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath..." The leaders of Israel were spiritually blind and they led the people into their ignorant state.

⁴⁶ All Scripture citations are from the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update*. La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

⁴⁷ Others have interpreted the "house" as "the house of David" or "Jerusalem." However, the following verses in 24:1-3 make these options unlikely. The disciples point out the Temple buildings and ask Jesus "When will these things be?" Jesus' answer that "not one stone will be left upon another that will not be cast down" shows clearly that the house = the Temple.

⁴⁸ Mark 13:3 shows that only four of the disciples were initially present, "Peter and James and John and Andrew."

It is often noted that there are two questions here, rather than three, but some see as many as four.⁴⁹ The two question view is significant enough to briefly evaluate. Usually the argument is made that two questions are in view because of the two interrogatives, “when” (ποτε) and “what” (τι). The first being, “Tell us, when will these things happen” and the second, “What *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age.” However, there could just as easily be one “when” question and two “what” questions, making a total of three questions. Other times TSKS construction is noted in the last two questions, combining them into one question so that in the overall there are only two questions. However, a proper understanding of Granville-Sharps rule shows that if there is any relationship, it would be unclear because of the plural impersonal nouns.⁵⁰ Hart’s insistence that there are two questions is a crux in his case for Jesus’ being given more credit for originating the pre-trib rapture in Matt 24:36ff. According to Hart, “...Jesus answers these two questions in reverse order. This technique is called chiasm.”⁵¹ In other words, the second question, “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”, is answered first in 24:4-35, and then the first question, “When will these things happen?”, is answered second in 24:36ff.⁵² Hart and others interpret the disciples first question to mean “When will the signs of His coming and of the end of the age begin?” or put simply, “When will the day of the Lord begin?”⁵³ The day of the Lord is viewed as the entire 70th week. Hart’s answer is that there will be no signs indicating the day of the Lord is going to begin, that it is imminent, and therefore Jesus also introduced an imminent event that will happen simultaneously with the pre-trib rapture. However, the fatal flaw in this line of argument is that he has changed

⁴⁹ Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1980), 363.

⁵⁰ TSKS construction is present, but they are impersonal nouns and the relationship is unclear. It could be distinct, overlapping, first a subset of the second, second subset of the first, equality or identity, though identity is rare. It would not be wise to argue from the construction. Cf. Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1996), 270-290.

⁵¹ John F. Hart, “Jesus and the Rapture in Matthew 24” in *Evidence for the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), 48.

⁵² His argument is fortified by noting Jesus’ use of *περι δε* in 24:36 as denoting a “change of subject,” cross-referencing Paul’s usages of *περι δε* in 1 Corinthians for support (cf. 1 Cor 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). However, *περι δε* does not always have this meaning. In fact, Matthew uses *περι δε* four times and not once does it denote a “change of subject.” (cf. 20:6; 22:31; 24:36; 27:46). To read Paul’s usage into Matthew is an illegitimate totality transfer.

⁵³ For example, Hart said, “A key Greek transitional marker in verse 36, “Now concerning” (*peri de*), shifts the focus from the second advent to the events that begin the day of the Lord.” Hart, 46. Proponents often believe that the rapture begins the day of the Lord and occur at the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel. This is the view of dual imminence.

the meaning of the question the disciples asked. They didn't ask "When will the day of the Lord begin?" but "When will the temple buildings be destroyed?" That is what Jesus was talking about in Matt 23:38 when He said "your house is being left to you desolate," and that is what the disciples were pointing out in 24:1 when they "came up to point out the temple buildings to Him" and that is what Jesus prophesied would be torn down in 24:2 when He said "not one stone here will be left upon another."⁵⁴ Therefore, his entire argument is built on a crumbling edifice.

As for the first question, concerning when the temple buildings would be destroyed, most recognize that Matthew did not record Jesus' answer in his gospel. Some consider this to be an egregious error, as if something would be awry with the inspiration of Scripture.⁵⁵ However, most recognize that the inspired Luke 21:12-24 records a distinct section that has no parallel in Matthew or Mark. McClain explained,

It should be obvious that in this section of Luke's account we have the answer of Christ to the disciples' question about the judgment of Jerusalem and the temple, for here He speaks especially of the events which will occupy the time from His departure to the destruction of the city in A.D. 70.⁵⁶

While this seems clear, some have questioned why Matthew would include the first question without recording the answer.⁵⁷ The reason Matthew recorded the question is because it was connected to the other questions in the disciples' minds. However, the reason Matthew did not record the answer is because Jesus showed it was not connected. The destruction of the temple would happen in the near time frame, as Luke recorded in Luke 21:12-24, while the other events would take place in a later time frame in connection with the coming of the kingdom. Since Matthew's argument is that the kingdom has been postponed until a future generation of Israel utters the Messianic Greeting he only records the answer to the questions directly related to his argument.

As for the second question, what is the sign of Your coming, one passage that might be related to the sign is Zechariah 14:6-7, "In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light." Even this is not entirely clear, but it does sound strikingly similar to the luminaries dwindling providing a backdrop for

⁵⁴ Sometimes it is objected that they could not have been asking about the Temple, since it is singular, and their question is plural, "when will these things be." However, the nearest antecedent is the "temple buildings," which is plural. They are asking when the "temple buildings" would be destroyed.

⁵⁵ Wes Spradley, *Jesus is a Pre-Tribber*, (paper delivered at the Grace Evangelical Society, Fort Worth, January, 2017), 3.

⁵⁶ Alva McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 364.

⁵⁷ Toussaint, 268.

the sign of the Son of Man in the sky (Matt 24:29-30). What that sign was they did not know. But what we know is that the disciples had a very definite meaning of *παρουσια* in mind. It referred to the day He would return to earth to end this present age and usher in the Messianic age. It certainly did not refer to a broader period of time such as “the day of the Lord” or the entire “70th week” as some suggest.⁵⁸ The disciples were thinking in terms of Zechariah 14 and Daniel 2, 7, 9 and 12. Their question relates to a precise indicator that would signal His coming. Daniel predicted this would happen immediately after the 70th week, when all Gentile kingdoms would be crushed simultaneously (Dan 2:44-45; 7:12-14; 26-27). Then and only then will the Son of Man come in His kingdom. The use of the title Son of Man is also important in clarifying the discourses relationship to the kingdom (cf 24:27, 30, 36, 37, 39, 44; 25:31). Its origin as Messianic is Daniel 7:13-14 where the Son of Man is seen receiving an everlasting kingdom. It is used 86 times of Jesus in the NT, 84 of which are in the gospels with some relationship to the kingdom and the other two view Him in His exaltation, at the right hand of the Father, ready to return to establish the kingdom. The title Son of Man relates entirely to the kingdom. It does not relate to Christ coming for His Church at the rapture or a coming in the broad day of the Lord. Therefore, the disciples question about the sign of His coming is not about the rapture or the coming of the broad day of the Lord, it is about the coming of the Son of Man on the day He returns in His kingdom. This meaning is consistent throughout the discourse.

The third question concerns “the end of the age.” The disciples asked about the *συντελειας*, the very end. This relates to Dan 12:13 where Daniel was told that he would “enter into rest and rise *again* for” his “allotted portion at the end of the age.” The last phrase in the LXX is *εις συντελειαν ημερων*, the end day. The prepositional prefix *συν-* emphasizes it is the very end. Daniel was told in 12:11 that the very end day was the 1,335th day. Therefore, the third question relates to the 1,335 days and is separated from the day of the Second Coming by seventy days. Interestingly, Jesus mentions “the end” often (*τελος* in Matt 24:6, 13, 14), as a reference to the end of the birth pangs and His Second Coming, but the *συντελειαν*, the “very end”, is never spoken of outside of the disciples’ questions. However, we know from Daniel it will be seventy-five days after the Second Coming. That’s the day when the blessings of the kingdom begin.⁵⁹ The seventy-five days are a period of transition from the 70th week to the blessing of the kingdom. Therefore, when Jesus comes He comes in His kingdom, but there are seventy-five days of transitional judgments that will take place upon surviving Jews and Gentiles to determine

⁵⁸ Gaebelin, Frank E., A. Skevington Wood, Homer A. Kent Jr., Curtis Vaughn, Robert L. Thomas, Ralph Earle, D. Edmond Hiebert, and Arthur A. Rupprecht. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*. Vol. 11, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 318.

⁵⁹ Anyone who does not make it to that day will be cast into “outer darkness.” “Outer darkness” refers to outside the kingdom, not in the kingdom at all. They are cast out because they are not believers. Additionally, the entire kingdom is the wedding banquet, not just the initial portion of the kingdom. The kingdom is compared to a wedding banquet to emphasize the celebratory joy of the kingdom.

who enters the blessing of the kingdom.⁶⁰ The parables at the end of Matthew 24:46-25:30 and the illustration of Matthew 25:31-46 describe these judgments.

Therefore, the meaning of the three question, and what the disciples' really wanted to know was, "What is the relationship *in time* between the destruction of the temple buildings and the sign of His coming and the end of the age?" They knew from Zechariah 12-14 that in the last days Jerusalem and Judea would come under attack resulting in a miraculous deliverance by the Messiah, bringing about the end of the age and the beginning of the age of Messiah.⁶¹ But how did the destruction of the temple fit into that picture? They probably assumed it would take place at the same time Jerusalem was under attack. As Bruce said, "The questioners took for granted that all three things went together; destruction of the temple, advent of Son of Man, end of the current age."⁶² Jesus' full answer, when harmonized with Luke 21:12-24, shows that they did not all go together, one would occur in the near time frame, and the other in a future time frame. Matthew recorded the answer that related to the future time frame because it fits into his argument.

Jesus' Answer (24:4-31)

Having discussed the proper understanding of the disciples' questions, we now come to Jesus' answer in 24:4. Again, Matthew does not record Jesus' answer to the first question, but it is plainly recorded in Luke 21:12-24, and it was fulfilled between His ascension and AD70. In verse 4 He begins to answer the second question. The answer seems to revolve around the all-important Matthew 24:15, where Jesus mentioned Daniel the prophet and the abomination of desolation from Daniel 9:27. Thus, the 70th week of Daniel provides the Old Testament framework for His answer.

As mentioned before under the evaluation of modern dispensational views, following Pentecost, the 70th week may be broken down as follows; 24:4-8 refers to some of the events of the first half of the 70th week; 24:9-14 describes some events of the second half of the 70th week when Israel comes under distress all the way to the

⁶⁰ The proper interpretation of not a few parables in the Gospels depend upon understanding that when Jesus returns in His kingdom there are still judgments that will result in unbelievers being cast out of His kingdom (E.g. Matt 13:36-43; 22:1-14).

⁶¹ "In Jewish eschatology two ages were recognized, the first was this present age, the age in which Israel was waiting for the coming of the Messiah; the second was the age to come, the age in which all of Israel's covenants would be fulfilled and Israel would enter into her promised blessings as a result of Messiah's coming. The present age would be terminated by the appearance of Messiah, and the coming age would be introduced by His advent." Pentecost, 398.

⁶² Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels" in *The Expositors Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002) 1:289.

end; then 24:15 recapitulates and describes the event spoken of by Daniel that will trigger the second half of the 70th week.⁶³ Enns said,

In 24:4-8 Jesus describes the signs in the first half of the Tribulation. These are not signs for the church, since the church will be raptured prior to the Tribulation. These signs parallel Revelation 6....In the second half of the Tribulation (vv. 9-14) the suffering will intensify. "Then" (v. 9) marks a transition, referring to the occasion when the Antichrist breaks the covenant with Israel and persecutes the nation (Dan. 9:27)....Matthew 24:15-26 amplifies the period discussed in 24:9-14. In 24:9-14 Jesus foretold many signs; now He singles out one sign—the Abomination of Desolation (v. 15).⁶⁴

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

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

24:4-8 describes some of the events of first half of the 70th week of Daniel. This is established by several lines of argument. First, the linguistic connection throughout the passage of the verb "mislead" (Gk. *πλανω*), which means "be deceived." Jesus uses this verb in verses 4, 5, 11 and 24 to reveal the key characteristic of the 70th week. The key characteristic is deception. In verse 4 Jesus said, "See to it that no one deceives you." In verse 5, "many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." In verse 11 He says, "Many false prophets will arise and will deceive many." In verse 24 says, "false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect." Most dispensational interpreters admit that deception in verses 11 and 24 refer to the tribulation, but some claim that verses 4 and 5 refer to the early church or the entire Church age. However, it is inconsistent to distinguish Jesus' use of "deception" such that some of it refers to deception during the present Church age and the rest refers to deception during the Tribulation. The very reason Jesus begins with warning against deception is because it is the key characteristic of the entire 70th week.

Second, the linguistic connection throughout the passage of "false Christs." Jesus refers to false Christs in verses 5, 23 and 24. In verse 5 Jesus warned that "many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ...'" In verse 23 He said, "Then, if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There,' do not believe." And in v 24, "For false

⁶³ Several hold this position. See Barbieri, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Paul Enns, *The Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 287. Renald Showers, *The Sign of His Coming*, 15, 21-27.

⁶⁴ Paul Enns, *The Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 287.

Christs and false prophets will arise..." Why do all dispensational interpreters admit that the false Christs in verses 23 and 24 will come during the Tribulation, but some continue to maintain that the ones in verse 5 will come between AD30 and 70 or throughout the Church age? This is simply inconsistent with the Jesus' usage. Jesus is teaching that during the 70th week many false Christs will appear on the world stage all at one time, not that there will be one here or there throughout the Church age. The many at one time will be part of the heightened deception characteristic of the 70th week.

Third, the wars in verses 6 and 7 are better explained by the second seal in Rev 6:3-4 than they are by WWI and WWII. For a long time now interpreters have pointed out that Matthew 24:4-8 has many parallels with the seal judgments. Jesus warned against false Christs in Matthew 24:4-5 and the first seal is a false Christ(s) in Revelation 6:1-2; Jesus mentioned kingdom warring against kingdom in Matthew 24:6-7 and the second seal is war in Revelation 6:3-4. Is it not better to tie these passages together than to separate them and make the conjecture that they refer to WWI and WWII? Especially living when we do now, over 100 years after the beginning of WWI and considering the fact that the generation that saw that war did not see all the other things Jesus said they would see take place (Matt 24:32-34).

Fourth, in verse 6 it is "not yet the end," but by verse 14 it is "the end." Therefore, the entire 70th week must be described in 24:4-14.

Fifth, the verse 7 "famines and earthquakes" are better explained by the third and sixth seals than present famines and earthquakes. It's common to say that these are fulfilled in the present age and escalating until the 70th week, but the data is questioned by many expositors. Is it not better to connect these with the seals in Revelation 6? Jesus mentioned famines in Matthew 24:7 and the third seal is famine in Revelation 6:5-6; Jesus mentioned earthquakes in Matthew 24:7 and the sixth seal is a great earthquake in Revelation 6:12-17. Why shouldn't we connect these famines and earthquakes directly to the seal judgments?

Sixth, verse 8 says that everything in verses 4-8 are "the beginning of birth pangs." The issue here is whether the birth pangs precede the 70th week or refer to events within the 70th week. The analogy of birth pangs comes from pregnancy. Pregnancy requires a long period of gestation followed suddenly by the onset of pains that result in a child being born. By analogy the world will undergo a long period of gestation followed suddenly by the onset of pains coming upon the world that will escalate until the kingdom is born. Price said,

...the involuntary and uncontrollable nature of birth pangs, as well as their intensification leading ultimately to a time of deliverance, well pictured the concept of a time of divine judgment that must run its course until the promise of new life could be experienced.”⁶⁵

It is not the Tribulation when new life is experienced, but the kingdom. Therefore, the birth pangs are not within the Church age but within the 70th week entirely.

The first half of the 70th week, then, is “the beginning of birth pangs,” described in 24:4-8. Not all the events of the first half are described, only a sampling. More details will be given in Revelation 6-11. There we find out that the first half involves the seal and trumpet judgments.⁶⁶ Together these constitute the beginning of the birth pangs, but they are not the end. The end will come in verse 14, where it says, “then the end will come.” That will conclude the second half of the 70th week, including the bowl judgments.

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

24:9-14 describes some of the events of second half of the 70th week of Daniel. This is established by several lines of argument. First, in verse 9 the word “Then” (τοτε) signifies a transition to things that will take place after “the beginning of birth pangs” (v 8). Some have tried to argue that the things of verse 9 take place simultaneously with the events in verses 4-8, thus placing them in the first half.⁶⁷ However, the word does not have this meaning. It can mean, “at that time,” emphasizing the immediacy of an event following on the heels of whatever was prior, or it can mean “then, thereupon,” as simply an event which follows in time.⁶⁸ Either way it refers to an event that will follow “the beginning of birth pangs,” and not something that occurs simultaneously with them. Therefore, verse 9 occurs after the beginning of the birth pangs, and is not a part of the beginning of those pangs. It begins the second half birth pangs.

Second, verse 9 describes perfectly what happens to the believing remnant of Israel at the midpoint. The “you” who are delivered over to tribulation and killed and hated by all nations because of Jesus’ name refers to the

⁶⁵ J. Randall Price, “Old Testament Tribulation Terms” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 71-72.

⁶⁶ See Robert Dean, “The Chronological Relationship of the Three Septet Judgments of the Tribulation to Daniel’s Seventy Weeks”, <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/chronological-relationship-of-three-septet-judgments-tribulation-to-daniels-seventy-weeks>

⁶⁷ <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-9>

⁶⁸ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1012-1013.

believing Jewish remnant. Many argue that this is a description of martyrs in general during the first half of the tribulation, and so a continuation of seal judgments described in verses 4-8, placing it in the first half. However, there are two reasons this is incorrect. First, the “you” who will be hated by all nations and killed are not believers in general but the believing Jewish remnant. To not accept this is to change the meaning of Jesus’ audience in the middle of the discourse. The “you” throughout is the future Jewish remnant being addressed through the believing disciples. The mention of them being “hated by all nations” should immediately bring to mind the Gentile nations that will oppose the Jewish saints as revealed in Daniel 7:21-22, 25 where we are told that this will go on for “a time, times and half a time,” and which is clarified for us in Revelation 12:6, 13, 17; 13:7 to be the second half of the 70th week (also cf Dan 8:24; 12:1, 7). Believers besides Jews will be killed, of course, but the group in view in Matthew 24:9 are future believing Jews. The moment the world will turn against them is the midpoint, not sometime in the first half. Second, a careful study of the fifth seal shows that it is not martyrdom, but the prayers of the martyrs that secure the doom of their slayers. The martyrs were evidently killed during seals two, three or four.⁶⁹ Garland says, “This then, is the judgment associated with the fifth seal—that petition of God by the martyred saints seals the fate of those who put them to death.”⁷⁰ The fifth seal is not even mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24:9. Thus, Matthew 24:9 is referring to the beginning of the persecution of the future Jewish remnant which follows the “beginning of the birth pangs” and begins at the midpoint. It is a result of Satan being cast out of heaven (Rev 12) and implementing his strategy to destroy the Jewish believers through the anti-Christ (Rev 13) so that they cannot utter the Messianic Greeting initiating the return of Messiah (Matt 23:39).

Third, verse 10 describes division in the nation Israel when the nations of the world turn against the Jewish remnant. This will occur during the second half. “At that time (τοτε), many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.” There will be betrayal among the Jewish people, as those who follow the policies of the anti-Christ betray members of the Jewish remnant.

Fourth, verse 11 describes “false prophets” that “will arise” and “mislead many,” parallel to the false prophets in Zechariah 13:2-6, which are in the second half.

⁶⁹ The fifth seal is one of the most intriguing. When the Lamb breaks the seal, nothing happens on earth. What happens is in heaven. The martyrs are already there. The actual outworking of the seal is the answer to the martyr’s prayer throughout the rest of the judgments, and especially the bowls. For the time being they are told to “rest.”

⁷⁰ Anthony C. Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, (Galaxie Software, 2006), Rev 6:10.

http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Book_of_Revelation/commentary/htm/chapters/06.html#3.6.11

"It will come about in that day," declares the Lord of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. And if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, 'You shall not live, for you have spoken falsely in the name of the Lord'; and his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies." (Zech 13:2-3)

This is most certainly during the second half of the tribulation, providing more evidence for Matthew 24:9-14 describing the second half of the tribulation.

Fifth, verse 12 describes this period as one of "lawlessness" reminding us that the anti-Christ will be a man of lawlessness. Daniel 7:25 teaches that the anti-Christ would intend to make "alterations in times and in law." This is stated explicitly to take place for "a time, times and half a time," which is the second half of the tribulation. Confirming this, we also know from 2 Thessalonians 2:3 that one of his titles is "the man of lawlessness." The point is that Matthew 24:12 refers to events in the second half of the tribulation, not the first.

Sixth, verses 13 and 14 speak of events right before the end of the 70th week, events that will immediately precede the sign of His coming. These are in the second half. The disciples had asked about the sign and the end of the age, Jesus takes them up to the events just before the end in these verses. Verse 13 encourages them to persevere to the end. In the context this is Jewish saints persevering in love during the second half. Because of the lawlessness under the policies of the anti-Christ, love will grow cold among the Jewish people, but the one who endures to the end in love, he will be saved. This is a physical rescue by the Messiah at His Second Coming.⁷¹ This verse shows that the events of verse 14 are in the second half of the tribulation. 24:14 states that "This gospel of the kingdom" shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." The gospel of the kingdom is preached whenever the kingdom is "at hand," meaning imminent, on the verge of breaking into history. In Revelation 14:6-7 an angel will fly in the atmosphere above earth and preach "an eternal gospel" "to every nation and tribe and tongue and people..." If this is to be connected with Matthew 24:14, then it is further evidence that this will occur in the second half of the tribulation, just before the end when the sign of the coming of the Son of Man will appear, and not in the first half.

24:15 is the midpoint and it is the verse that gives the overall structure of 24:4-31 as the 70th week of Daniel. The abomination of desolation is the event that will indicate to Jewish believers in the land that they must flee because of the coming hatred and destruction coming as described in 24:9. All dispensationalists agree that this event and the verses that follow describe the second half of the 70th week, so there is no need to discuss these verses.

⁷¹ Of course they are believing Jews. That is already presupposed. What is at stake is that believing Jews not grow cold in their love.

Conclusion

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

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

The second part of the paper emphasizes that the overall argument of Matthew must be kept in mind throughout. All of the discourses relate to the kingdom in some way and the Olivet Discourse relates to the events immediately preceding the coming of the King in His kingdom. Jesus was lamenting the fact that generation rejected. He pronounced judgment on the temple and announced He would not return until the nation welcomed Him back. The disciples asked about the timing of the destruction of the temple buildings in relation to the sign of His coming and the end of the age. Jesus' answer was that the temple buildings would be destroyed in the near time frame (recorded by Luke) and the sign of His coming and end of the age would occur in the far time frame. The far time frame is held together by the linguistic connection of "deception" and "false Christs" throughout the whole passage. The illustration of the fig tree and the statement that the generation that sees all these things will not pass away until all these things take place puts all the events in a compact time frame, which is the 70th week of Daniel. The descriptions of false Christs, deception, wars, famines and earthquakes are more certainly linked to the events of the first half of the 70th week in Revelation 6 than they are to events during Church History. Therefore, the first half of the 70th week is described in Matthew 24:4-8. These are the beginning of birth pangs. The word "then" in 24:9 transitions to the second half when the nations of the world will hate the Jewish remnant and deliver them to tribulation and death. This will cause division in the nation and false prophets will abound leading many to be deceived. An increase in lawlessness under the policies of the anti-Christ will cause the love of most to grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be rescued. The mention of the end signifies the end of the 70th week. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the nations in the second half. Then the end will come. 24:15 recapitulates in the sense of revealing the abomination of desolation as the event spoken of by Daniel the prophet that will initiate the persecution of the

Jewish remnant in verse 9. Therefore, the conclusion is that there are no signs in the present Church age that are indicative of His coming, only events that are setting the stage for these verses to be fulfilled during the first and second halves of the 70th week. Selah.